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KESTELL OF GREYSTONE

A NOVEL.

BY

ESMÈ STUART.

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KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

RUSHBROOK HOUSE.

It would be very difficult to say at which time of the year the country about Rushbrook Beacon shows to most advantage. Beautiful it always is, this high moorland, which Nature has enriched with every color that can most please the eye and send immeasurable joy into a heart that loves beauty. This Beacon is the highest land in Southshire, and one can look round on every side and see a wondrous diversity of views; from the south, where blue, undulating hills speak of pastures on sunny slopes, to the north, where the long, stern ridge of heathy moor, marked out by solitary fir clumps, makes one realize the silent majesty of uncultivated lands, through which man has ventured on no other sign of his cunning than by making the broad, sandy high-road, where formerly the heavy coach rolled on toward the sea-coast, but where now picturesque country wagons crawl happily along, scorning the bare idea of the steam monster that has almost swallowed up all the carriers' carts of the more inhabited neighborhoods.

The high ridges of the moorland, or forest, as it is called, sweep away from the north to the west. On the east, as we stand on the Beacon, we can forget the grand desolation behind us, and, in our milder moods, we may feel glad that here the character of the land has nothing rugged about it; that the great sea of heather has been forbidden to advance; and that, amid green meadows and gentle undulations rising one behind the other, friendly windmills stretch out their four arms, courting the winds and gayly racing

through their morning's work, making music among the sails.

The Beacon has about a mile of almost flat land on its summit, and gradually slopes down on the north-west side to a beautiful valley, at the head of which stands Rushbrook House. Once it had been connected with a water-mill; but the grinding of the latter had ceased long ago, and Nature and art had contrived to render this spot one of the most lovely in the country; for the forest land had collected its trickling streams and had formed along the valley four exquisite pools, and these were edged with luxuriant trees of every description, coming sometimes close to the edge, sometimes climbing up steep hills on either side.

The village of Rushbrook lay scattered about on the top of the Beacon, where only one big house was to be seen. It was named "The Observatory," because this circular building had been added to a large and not very picturesque modern dwelling. Here lived Lord Cartmel, though he was chiefly to be found in the observatory chamber, star-gazing or poring over astronomical books. His only son, the Honorable Walter Akister, was a barrister, and had chambers in the Temple; but oftenest he might be seen at Rushbrook, and, like Cœlebs, he was said to be in search of a wife. His sister Betta, who was plain, shy, and aristocratic, spent her time in trying to fit the ways of her father and her brother into the puzzle of daily life.

Below the village lay the hamlet of Rushbrook Mills, where was situated the very picturesque Rushbrook House. Here lived Mr. Josiah Kestell, his wife, and two daughters. He had bought the place from Mr. Eagle Bennison, the squire, who owned miles of the forest land, which, though beautiful, was not exactly productive, so that the large sum offered to him by "Kestell of Greystone," as the lawyer had long been known, induced him to sell the old mill-house and a few acres of land, including the first of the pools, to the successful solicitor.

The squire's own house was situated at the other end of the valley, and above the last of the pools. It was known as Court Garden, and was reached by a road that was parallel with the water, then, crossing an old bridge, ran between fir-wood and steep inclines up to the squire's abode, from whence one looked down on the leafy maze below

and far away to the northern ridge of forest before mentioned.

It was often a subject of discussion whether Rushbrook House, with its exquisite picturesqueness; its tall, gray-arched bridge, spanning the head of the valley and acting as a kind of draw-bridge to the house; its beautiful pool in front, where the wild-fowl and the moor-hens fluttered; its overhanging trees and all its other charms; surpassed the wider views and the larch and fir plantations of Court Garden.

Both houses were, so it appeared, far from the busy haunts of men, for there was a three-mile drive to Rushbrook Station, and then a ten-minute train journey to Greystone; or, if one preferred it, a five-mile walk to Greystone, which boasted of being the county town of Southshire.

In winter, though the sandy roads never seemed muddy, the region could look very grand and desolate when storms swept over the great Beacon and rushed down to the valley, and when the roar of the voices of the winds among the huge firs added the charm of the awful and the terrible to this favored spot.

Perhaps it is not enough realized how much the things we look at in our childhood help to mold our characters. Certainly something of the beauty and the honest waywardness of the nature around her had helped to form Elva Kestell's moods. She had come to Rushwood House when quite a child, and she could well remember how she had led her younger sister Amice many a journey of exploration, rejecting the escort of nurse or governess. Mrs. Kestell was an invalid and Mr. Kestell was but little at home, and, moreover, a most indulgent father, so the two girls had, as it were, formed their own characters and strengthened their own inclinations, till now that they were grown into the come-out-young-lady age they were themselves, and not artificial girls; but so dissimilar were they that it would have been difficult to believe their close relationship. One, and one thing only, they equally possessed —a passionate love for their home, and for the beautiful nature that surrounded them. In Elva it came out in that passion of life—if one may use the expression—that determined associating of the mental with the physical existence, and that fitfulness of purpose which the winds of heaven

apparently possess. But with Amice it was quite different. The still, deep, shrinking character seemed to understand the mysteries of the hidden world in a way in which very few have learned to understand them, and which those few have seldom disclosed, preferring to carry their curious link with them to the grave than to expound it, perhaps being quite unable to tell us what hidden sympathy has connected them with the physical world.

This evening there were no wayward winds, however, and an exquisite moonlight haze seemed to envelope Rushbrook House with kindly softness; the trees were all painted in a dark-gray wash, and in the stillness of the early September evening not a leaf seemed to stir.

The shutters were not yet closed, and lights twinkled here and there in apparently magnified splendor. In one window, any person standing on the old, ivy-covered bridge would have noticed the outline of a girl crossing and recrossing the light within.

Elva Kestell was dressing for a dinner-party, but all at once she paused in this usually important occupation, and, sitting down by the side of her dressing-table, she thrust her well-shaped hands into a thick mass of wavy hair, and, with an impatient gesture, read for the third time a paragraph on one page of "The Current Reader."

Yet she knew the words almost by heart, and they seemed engraved on her brain with the exactness of an inscription on a piece of presentation plate:

"We have seldom read a book which so utterly failed in its purpose as does 'An Undine of To-day,' by Isidore Kent. That the author had, when she wrote this novel, praiseworthy intentions, we can scarcely doubt, when we have waded through her work; and we purposely say 'she,' for no masculine disguise could hide the sex of the writer whose purpose—always supposing she had one—has been to show that the apparently soulless being, whom we call a young lady in society, can be endowed with thought and feeling, if only some good man will take her in hand by the usual method of matrimony. But even this idea is undefined, and we are led to doubt not only whether the hero himself has a soul, but whether, if he has one, he would be capable of dividing it into two equal parts with his Undine. We shall not take away the little inter-

est the book possesses by divulging the plot, but we must protest against Isidore Kent's false ideas of honor. She pours her vials of wrath upon her hero, who very naturally fights shy of a young lady whose relations were decidedly shady. We, on the other hand, would congratulate him on his narrow escape.

"It is a pity such novels as 'An Undine of To-day,' find publishers, for they neither enrich literature nor the minds of those who read them.

"HOEL FENNER."

Elva Kestell, having again reached the end of the notice, pushed back her chair, and said aloud:

"Hoel Fenner, I hate him! What a horrid, cruel review, and he has purposely misunderstood me."

Then she walked to her book-shelf and took down a volume bound in sky-blue cloth, and upon which one could read in gold letters, "An Undine of To-day, by Isidore Kent."

"One good thing is," she continued, mentally, "that no one but papa, mamma, and Amice know that I am Isidore Kent, and they will not tell—I made them promise. But I never thought a man could be so cruel as to publish such words. I will never, never write again—never; and yet I had something to say—all the same, I hate Hoel Fenner, and I wish I could tell him so."

A knock at the door made Elva put back her volume hastily, and remember that she was not ready, which fact the maid who entered saw to her dismay, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Miss Elva, the carriage will be round in five minutes, and Mr. Kestell is already down-stairs."

"Well, make haste, Symee; this velvet dress is soon put on. It was too bad of Miss Amice to refuse to go; she was asked. Where's my fan?—quick, Symee, and the row of pearls."

"If you will sit down, Miss Elva, I will put this flower in your hair; it makes you look so nice," added Symee, in such a sweet, lady-like voice, that a stranger would at once have been struck by it. The truth was, Symee had been at Rushbrook House ever since her childhood, and many a game had she shared with her young mistresses.

Symee never forgot that Mr. Kestell had saved her and her brother from the work-house, and she tried to repay

her benefactor by an untiring devotion to his wife and daughters, which devotion they fully appreciated, and treated Symee more as a friend than a servant.

The five minutes were past before Elva managed to finish her toilet; and at this moment the door softly opened, and Amice Kestell stood on the threshold, looking more like some visitant from another world than the sister of such an altogether radiant person as Elva. Amice's face was perfectly colorless; so much so, that she appeared to be carved out of marble, except for the blue eyes that possessed a strange, far-off expression in them, while she had a curious habit of clasping her hands straight in front of her when she spoke. Even now, though Amice had come to say something, it was Elva who spoke first:

"Don't fuss, Amice dear; I shall be ready in two minutes."

Amice was dressed in plain white serge, high at the neck; and, thus attired, she contrasted curiously with her sister in her dark-blue velvet gown, cut square on her bosom, with the row of pearls round her slender throat, and the warm, rich coloring of her face. In a tableau the sisters would have made a good representation of Life and Death.

"Papa will be angry if you keep him waiting," said Amice, nervously. "I am glad I am not going."

"How ridiculous you are, Amice; papa angry, indeed! Why, he never is out of temper, is he, Symee? You are always saying things like that; it is not fair and just to papa."

Even in this speech the impulsive generosity of Elva was visible. She was devoted to her father, and was ready to stand up for him, even though she knew her tone would hurt the feelings of her sister.

"I never should say that to a stranger," said Amice, in a voice full of contrition; but certainly it was not Elva who frightened her, for she stood gazing with undisguised admiration at her as she hurried hither and thither.

"There, I am ready; do I look nice, Amice?"

"Yes, you look beautiful," said Amice; "and oh, dear Elva, it was good of you to take my place."

"Good of me! You know I like society; only mamma is so upset by your hermit-like ideas. What shall I say to Mrs. Eagle Bennison to excuse your absence? Poor Symee, you will have something to do to clear my things away."

"Oh, come quickly, Elva; I hear papa calling you," said Amice, seizing her sister's hand.

The two went down the oak staircase together, hand in hand, and Mr. Kestell, who was standing below in the hall, saw them plainly as they approached, while the lamp-light fell full on his white head; and Elva noted with a smile how handsome and how kind was the much-loved face of her father.

Mr. Kestell was of average height; but a slight stoop made him appear a little shorter than he was. His head was well-shaped and of fine proportions; he wore his white hair just touching his coat collar. He had once been likened by an enthusiastic and musical lady to "that dear sweet old Liszt." And certainly there was a slight likeness between the well-known genius and Mr. Kestell, the much-respected solicitor of Greystone, whose benevolent look and clear blue eyes were known to inspire confidence in any one who had business dealings with him. At this moment the smile that lighted up his face as he watched Elva coming down was quite reassuring. A man who smiles is not likely to be unduly severe, even if his horses have been kept waiting a few minutes.

"Eh, Miss Elva, five minutes late by the clock; and how often have I said the horses are not to be kept waiting by you girls? Come, make haste."

"Forgive me, father mine," said Elva, with a wonderfully bright look. "Now, don't forget your manners, but give me your arm properly, and hand a lady into her carriage in the most approved fashion. I should have been longer if Amice and Symee had not helped me."

Elva's words were full of affection, and the tone was that of a girl who knew she was loved and spoiled. As Mr. Kestell hurried across the hall, he involuntarily glanced toward the white figure that stood so motionless at the foot of the stairs, and, slightly turning his head, he said:

"That was kind of you, Amice. Good-night, my dear; you will be asleep when we come back. Take care of your mother."

Amice's white lips moved, but if she said anything it was inaudible to the two, who were quickly shut into the brougham by the help of the footman and the butler. Amice waited till the sound of the wheels could no longer

be heard, and then she walked to the morning-room, where Mrs. Kestell was sitting.

At a glance one could see that the wife of the rich solicitor was delicate, but it was the delicacy of a woman who has all her life been too much considered. No doctor could ever give a name to her illness, though one London physician, more truthful than wise, had said that there would be nothing the matter with Mrs. Kestell if she were a poor woman and had to earn her own living.

"So they are gone," she remarked to Amice, who sat down near her mother and shivered a little as if the room were cold, instead of being much too warm. "Why did not Elva come in?"

"She was late, and papa was—annoyed at being kept waiting."

"Was he? That is strange; he did not seem to mind when he was in here. Elva will coax him round. I wish, Amice, you were more like her, and that you would try to get over your eccentricities. You won't go into society, and even all the money that has been spent on your voice is thrown away, as you will sing so seldom."

Mrs. Kestell called Amice eccentric, and yet it was difficult to define in what way she was so, except in her shyness. Otherwise, if anything had to be done of a disagreeable nature, it was to Amice the household appealed.

There was but one very defined, strong feeling which Amice allowed others to see in her, and this was her love for her sister, and even of this Mrs. Kestell did not altogether approve.

"You know, mamma, that society does not appreciate the songs I care to sing."

"What nonsense! Elva's voice is not to be compared with yours, and yet she— I do believe you would be more like other girls if you did not continually shelter yourself behind her."

Amice did not answer this rebuke, but presently opened a book and read aloud till her mother dozed.

It might almost be said that Mrs. Kestell had dozed through life ever since her marriage with Josiah Kestell. He was a gentleman by birth, and had succeeded to a good solicitor's business at Greystone, and this business he had trebled by luck and hard work. Now, however, he took life more easily, leaving the hard work to his partner, Ed-

ward Hope, a cousin of his wife. Mr. Kestell was known to be very rich, having a property on which, some twenty-three years before, valuable mines had been discovered and worked with extraordinary success. The two Miss Kestells were therefore known to be endowed with much of this world's goods, and now that they were come out there was some speculation as to their future husbands, and, though it is unpoetical to mention the fact, several elderly men who looked upon Mr. Kestell as their most trusted friend, had deeply considered whether they could not improve their fortunes by offering themselves as his sons-in-law.

Mrs. Kestell was of a very good family. She was the third daughter of Sir Arthur Ovenden, whose acres were few, whose pedigree was long, whose debts were many, and whose pride was unlimited. But man must live, and so must his daughters, and when Celia Ovenden was wooed by Josiah Kestell, gentleman, and solicitor of Greystone, Sir Arthur, knowing that if he died suddenly his girls' portions would be extremely small, accepted Mr. Kestell's offer with as good a grace as the owner of so many noble ancestors could muster, though at the same time telling Josiah Kestell that he formerly had views of his daughter Celia marrying a rich man.

"I shall be rich," was Josiah's answer. "I have an excellent business at Greystone, and I will double it. I promise you that your daughter shall live as she has been accustomed to live."

Sir Arthur gave in with a great show of reluctance, though the truth was, that Celia became at once better off than she had been in the parental household. Since then, her husband had so well kept his promise that the after-dinner theme of poor men was Kestell of Greystone's fortune. There had not only been hard work to account for it —though that had not been wanting—but there had also been luck in his mining operations, and, as money has a curious affinity with its own kind, money had made money, had doubled money, had coined money, so that Mrs. Kestell could now patronize the elder sisters who had said slighting things about Celia's marrying only a solicitor.

Besides money, Mrs. Kestell had a devoted husband. For her sake he had bought Rushbrook House; for her sake he cultivated society, and entertained as much as was possible; and he seemed well rewarded for his trouble if

she sometimes expressed a sleepy pleasure at her possessions, or made the rare exertion to go to a dinner-party. But now the girls were grown up, and it seemed very unlikely that Mrs. Kestell would ever again exert herself to go about with her husband.

When Amice and her mother had dined, the former again read aloud, for Mrs. Kestell liked to listen to the musical murmur of her daughter's voice; but the "Life of Sister Dora" was far beyond the comprehension of Celia Kestell, and before ten o'clock she said she would go to bed.

"And pray, dear Amice, don't sit up reading; it makes you more eccentric. Go to bed, and try and get a little color in your cheeks. Undressing at night is a great trouble; but I must say that Symee is very quick and handy. What a blessing your father's kindness has turned out for us! I'm sure one would often do kind things if one could look forward and see how it answers in the end."

The bell was rung. A footman lighted the candle and opened the doors; the housekeeper came to suggest some new dainty to put by the invalid's bedside; Symee met her mistress on the stairs. Thus, with the help of three persons, Mrs. Kestell retired to bed.

Left alone in the sitting-room, with its shaded lamps and its luxurious chairs, Amice Kestell breathed a little sigh of relief. She went to the window, and, drawing back the curtain, she gazed out at the beautiful moonlit bridge, the pool, and the great Beacon in the distance. She could catch the light in the observatory and on some few smaller houses, as if the stars had fallen upon earth; but the beauty of the scene did not seem to impress any look of joy on the marble-like face. On the contrary, it seemed a little to irritate her, and, dropping the heavy folds, Amice began slowly pacing the sitting-room with clasped hands and her head a little thrown back, apparently quite lost to the riches and comforts which surrounded her.

"Sister Dora was a grand woman," she said, talking to herself; "but I prefer Catherine of Sienna. If only one could be like her! Oh, why is it impossible? Why do things about one seem to tie one down with unbreakable chains? It is so difficult, so difficult; and what is right? How much of the world can one renounce? Here they are angry with me. Mamma wants me to love society, and

papa—only Elva has pity on me. My dear, dear sister—but she can not understand—she is better than I am, and all this gold does not hurt her. It is gold, gold that is eating away one's life. How can I get rid of it? But they say I am wrong, that this feeling is merely self-will and pride. Is it true, oh, Heaven? Tell me, and let me know the truth."

So strong was the girl's distress that she paused suddenly, and kneeling down on the floor, hid her face in her hands in mute and tearless agony.

That undefinable mystery, a young wrestling soul full of the realization of its own life and its own hopes and fears, its own struggles and attempts at soaring above its surroundings, has been over and over again presented to the world; and the world, not being able to understand the phenomenon, gives to it various gently sarcastic names, such as self-deception, spiritual pride, and willful ignorance, or, if driven to stronger language, sums it all up in the term "superstitious folly." No wonder that many—and Amice was one of these—shrink with overpowering fear from asking for help from those who pretend to answer all riddles; and, instead of begging for sympathy, suffer agonies of mental tortures in trying to make the spiritual and the physical life join hands.

Amice took no account of time as she knelt on, till suddenly a slight shiver passed through her, and, rising hastily, she walked upstairs.

As she ascended the low, broad steps, lighted by a large window, the branches of an old yew-tree were shaken by the night wind; and it seemed as if some bony fingers had knocked at the window and signaled to Amice to come out; but she heeded nothing, only walked on till she reached a small door at the end of a long, uncarpeted passage at the top of the house. Here she paused, and knocked softly. A faint voice said: "Come in;" and Amice entered, to find her maid Symee lying down on her bed in a bare little room, where only the moon gave a fitful light.

Symee was fully dressed, and only covered up with a shawl; but surprise caused her to sit up for a moment as her young mistress said:

"Symee, your head is bad; undress and go to bed. Don't sit up for Miss Elva; I will help her when she comes in."

At the same time Amice put a cool, soft hand on the maid's forehead, which sent a momentary delicious relief from pain to the aching brow.

"Miss Amice, how kind you are! How did you know I had a headache? But I must sit up."

"No, you must go to bed. Make haste; I will come back when you are undressed."

Amice walked softly out of the room, and went to the end of the passage, where a window looked out on to the sloping lawns and hanging woods of Rushbrook House.

"I must hide it," she thought. "I dare not tell any one. Is it a gift, or—" She shivered a little. "What am I saying? That I will not have what God gives me. How can I be so wicked? Surely we are children in God's hands, and yet have we free will. How can both things be possible? How are we to guide ourselves, and yet be guided by God?"

This puzzling thought filled the girl's mind till she returned to her maid, whom she found in bed, but hardly able to bear the terrible pain in her head.

"Miss Amice, please put your hand on my head again," she moaned, "it is so cool."

"I will," said Amice; and kneeling down on the bare boards, she once more placed her soft, cool hand on Symee's head. And had any one been present they would have seen her white figure lighted up with dancing moonbeams, which, as they now and then touched her pale face, showed that her lips were moving.

After a short silence Symee spoke.

"Oh, Miss Amice, it seems like a miracle. The pain is going; thank you so very much. I feel sleepy; and yet I thought just now I should be awake all night."

"Hush!" said Amice; and when, after a little while, she rose from her knees, Symee was sleeping as quietly as a tired child after a day's pleasure.

CHAPTER II.

DINNER AND A CRITIC.

COURT GARDEN was in its way a perfect country-house, and the squire was loved and respected by all his tenants; but to the world in general he was known as the husband of Mrs. Eagle Bennison. This was his title of honor, and

he was proud to accept it. He always showed the same imperturbable front to the world; while his wife was, on the whole, like a highly cut diamond, many-sided. She had her sprightly mood, her sad mood, her religious mood, her worldly, her playful, her would-be child-like, and her pathetic mood. No one had ever yet found out which of these many moods was most natural to her, and if any one ventured to decide this knotty point, he soon avowed himself wrong.

Mrs. Eagle Bennison's dinner-parties were always pleasant; for, in spite of her own personality being never forgotten, the squire's wife was not unwilling that others, when in her house, should shine; and as she had a kind of child-like simplicity, in spite of her great artificiality, she somehow made opposite elements fuse together from sheer surprise at her audacity.

To describe her would need time; for how can pen do justice to the various lights and shades that flitted over the pretty face of Mrs. Eagle Bennison? Her age could not be guessed, for trouble had never made wrinkles; her bright eyes were never hidden by *pince-nez* or spectacles, though she was known to be short-sighted; her teeth—were they hers except by purchase?—looked like pearly treasures, and were so often exhibited when she smiled, that at last one learned to expect the vision just as regularly as, but more frequently than, the cuckoo of a Swiss clock. She had no gray hairs, though what aid to everlasting color she used was not revealed; and as for the rest of her appearance, she was not tall, but rather short and neat; her hands were plump and white, and profusely ornamented with jewels which had descended from the Eagles, the Bennisons, and the Eagle Bennisons. These precious stones were unfailing subjects of conversation; for girls were of course delighted to hear that this diamond ring had once belonged to Lady Eagle when her husband was Governor of Bengal, and that the present Mrs. Eagle Bennison had inherited it through dear Sir Joseph Eagle, with whom she had been a prime favorite.

But enough of the hostess, for dinner is going on, and the squire's mutton is being eaten and praised, and Elva Kestell is listening to her neighbors' remarks with a smile, a really natural smile, on her lips. Mrs. Eagle Bennison's cousin, George Guthrie, was so often at Court Garden that

he was almost one of the household; and Elva was glad she had been taken in by him this evening, for she was in no mood to be pleasant, and George was glad of a listener, and he was always good company. There was a twinkle in his eyes, though seldom a smile on his lips, when he spoke. He was a confirmed bachelor, and having known Elva from childhood, they were on those intimate terms which are as delightful as they are rare. They called each other by their Christian names, and ideas of matrimony never crossed their minds.

Elva and her father having arrived a little late, she had not much noticed the other guests, till, now that she had time to look round, she saw a stranger, with a clever, refined face, talking to a young lady with straw-colored complexion, and hair, eyelashes, and dress of the same shade. The others Elva knew well; there was the Honorable Walter Akister and his sister Betta. Lord Cartmel, their father, was dreamily listening to Mrs. Bennison; but Elva saw that he was really up in the moon.

George Guthrie saw Elva's glance, and said:

"Isn't my dear cousin radiant to-night? but it's all lost on his lordship. By the way, she told me it was Amice who was to be my lady, and that I was to make her talk about the world. What queer things we poor bachelors, who have no idea of marrying, are given to do. The other day a mamma said: 'Dear Mr. Guthrie, you are such a safe man, now do win my poor Georgie's confidence, and make her give up young Henry Parker. You know he has nothing a year, and must make up his mind to be a bachelor.'"

George Guthrie slightly imitated the voice of the fond parent, so that Elva could not help laughing.

"You were offended by the word bachelor; perhaps some day we shall have to congratulate a Mrs. Guthrie—but that would be funny!"

"Funny; why funny, pray? That is like the impertinence of the young. Let me give you a piece of advice, my dear Elva. A man of my age can offer advice gratis, and expect it to be received graciously, and my advice to you is, don't marry the first man who asks you; if you do, you are sure to repent."

"I hate all men this evening," said Elva, and the words

of "The Current Reader" rose before her eyes. "They are so conceited, so prejudiced!"

"What makes you so indignant this evening? Not the first offer?"

"Oh, no, no, only a snub. I want to do something worth doing in the world, and at every turn I am stopped, because I am only a woman."

"'I charge thee fling away ambition!' Why you are ambitious and rich. Good heavens, Elva, what terrible fate will overtake you?"

"Don't tease me. I am in earnest. I mean to begin life again."

"Humph! How does one manage that? But look round even this dinner-table, and you will see how very well the world gets on without grand ideas and without brains. We will leave Lord Cartmel out of the question, he is all brains, but his son and daughter—on that point silence! Then my dear cousin, she has no brains; but she appreciates those who have. See how happy she is this evening because she has a new lion."

Elva looked up, and, curiously enough, met the eyes of the stranger, and the magic murmur of introduction not having been pronounced, she looked quickly down again without any look of recognition; but she felt amazed at the stranger's personal notice.

"I suppose you mean the man opposite—who is he?"

"A literary man. Some day I shall become one. I know the tricks of the trade. Put on in general company a slightly supercilious look, despise your neighbors without saying so in words, smile when they give their opinions about books, have abundant notes on scraps of paper put away somewhere for a future book, and never give a direct answer, and—well, then you are a full-fledged literary man. It is easy enough."

"But you forget the book that is published," said Elva, thinking of the crushing review, and feeling very thankful George did not know about it.

"Not at all, that is by no means necessary; it does just as well if you review the works of other people."

"And crush them?"

"Or praise them, if written by a friend."

"Is that ever done?"

"I advise you to try. Only first make friends with the gentleman opposite; he is a reviewer."

"A reviewer! What is his name, or is it a secret?"

"A secret! I should imagine not, as I see his name often in 'The Current Reader.' Ah, you were not introduced because you came late, and my cousin knew you were to be posted up by me."

"What nonsense you are talking this evening," said Elva, determined not to ask the name of the lion.

There were six or seven men who reviewed novels in "The Current Reader," and this one had perhaps read the review which had pained her so much.

"Nonsense! You are not complimentary! If I were Lord George Guthrie, and you a young lady of *ton* and fashion, you would think me clever, and my talk fascinating. What is it Lear says? 'Through tattered clothes small vices do appear; robes and furr'd gowns hide all.'"

"I don't suppose reviewers are rich; they can't be, or they wouldn't be so spiteful," said Elva.

"Don't be sarcastic! Do you see that my cousin can not hear all that the lion is saying, but she laughs just the same. I call that good manners."

"I call it being unreal."

"You have not seen much of society yet."

"I have had about six months of it; I waited for Amice, but now she is out she won't go anywhere. Mamma doesn't understand that it is really from shyness."

"I give you a year to reform. After that, Elva, you will not say what you think; you will not wish to do something which no one else does, and you will not stare so much at literary lions."

Yes, Elva was staring, for the straw-colored lady had just made a remark.

"Mr. Fenner, do tell me the name of the last novel you reviewed."

"What did she call him?" said Elva, trying to speak naturally, though she felt the hot color rush to her cheeks.

"Fenner, Hoel Fenner. Perhaps you have never noticed his name, but he is a rising man, only at Rushbrook we are so ignorant of our greatest men. In that way we represent the world."

"Hoel Fenner! Yes, I have seen his name. Why did he come here?"

"He was staying with the Heatons at St. John's Parsonage."

"Quite near to us," gasped Elva, for St. John's was a church which nestled in a fir plantation at the foot of the Beacon, and which Mr. Eagle Bennison's father had built for the scattered hamlet known as Rushbrook Mills. Mr. Heaton and his sister were both dining here this evening, and had asked if they might bring Mr. Hoel Fenner with them.

George Guthrie found Elva so silent after this that he turned toward his other neighbor, Miss Heaton, and by the time the ladies left the room he had discussed all the poor of Rushbrook Mills, with whom the amusing bachelor was a great favorite.

When the last sweep of the last train had rustled away, there was a general relaxation of the manly muscles; the squire leaned back in his chair, and George Guthrie bent forward. Walter Akister crossed his legs and turned sideways; the decanters solemnly went round in the fashion of a Parliamentary train, stopping with jerks at each station to discharge contents, and the whole manly company seemed to say, "Now we can be natural, there is no lady to make conversation for."

This was ungenerous conduct, for in the drawing-room the ladies were finding each other dull, their last sallies of wit being reserved till the men should appear.

George Guthrie, this evening, felt more drawn toward the stranger, Hoel Fenner. He knew all the squire's thoughts as translated in his meager vocabulary by heart. Walter Akister always froze up his geniality, for that young man was shy and not very good-tempered; besides, Mr. Guthrie, who was as clear-sighted as a woman, had discovered that young Walter spent a good deal of his time in looking at Elva Kestell, and he bore him a grudge for this. Lord Cartmel could not keep off sun, moon, and stars for long together, and George Guthrie had no turn for astronomy; but the stranger's face did interest him, so he changed his place and went and sat by him.

"You have no wine, Mr. Fenner; what shall I pass you?"

"Thank you, no more."

"A moderate drinker is the man most denounced just now," said George Guthrie, his face lighting up with his

peculiar smile of quiet amusement; "one expects an inmate of Grub Street to be accompanied by a large bowl of punch and a soaked towel round his temples. I have just been telling Miss Kestell that if she ever treads the path of literature you are a man to be feared."

Hoel Fenner was intensely amused, and this look suited his face well. He was certainly handsome, without being an Adonis; tall, well-made; keen, deep-set hazel eyes; hair coming rather low down on his broad forehead, a mustache that did not hide a well-cut mouth, and a clean-shaven, strongly marked chin and contour. His hands were specially noticeable in that they were delicately formed and yet strong in appearance—such hands as born surgeons possess.

"Miss Kestell. Was that the name of the lady on your right? It must have been something you said then which made her look at me so severely. Who is she? I am a stranger here. I have known Mr. Heaton only a few months. We met last year at Zermatt, and he kindly asked me to come and see him in his lovely vicarage."

"Every one about here knows Kestell *père*. There he sits, on the right; has general benevolence written on all his features, and as far as I know, he deserves it. Has made heaps of money, 'oof,' our youngsters call it. I wish you literary men could find out the derivation of slang words. A slang Max Muller would benefit mankind. That's by the way. As for Kestell, he has got all the county business; knows everybody's affairs. He's getting old now, and has a cousin, Edward Hope, as partner; but he won't be equal to Kestell of Greystone. Through his wife, the latter is connected with some of our best families. Our county magnates enjoy a fame which you in London seldom get. He has only two daughters. The family lives a mile or so from here, in a house that was once a large mill, but is really, as Mrs. Eagle Bennison says, a 'gem,' now Rushbrook House. Elva Kestell, the one here this evening, is the elder. If the mother could take them out in London, we should soon lose them, because money, you know, is better than beauty in these days. I don't admire Elva's face; but I've heard people say it is artistic. I don't know anything about art. The other, Amice, well, *entre nous*, I never can be sure that she is quite sound in the upper story—looks at you with great

blue eyes that make one feel creepy. Now you know the family history."

"An epitome worthy of 'Lodge's Peerage,'" said Hoel. Then, looking across at Mr. Kestell, he added, "How comes it that he is such a rich man? One doesn't expect solicitors to be noted for riches."

"I've heard people make that remark before; but I suppose he has been lucky; owns some mines somewhere, and worked hard. When I look at Kestell I feel that he is a living reproach to me, because I was born lazy. I spend months here, because my cousin Eagle Bennison says I help him; but it's a matter on which we differ."

Hoel was really amused with this genial bachelor, whose face beamed with an expression of fun, or assumed one of the mock heroic. One could not be melancholy in his company; there were only a few who knew that under his stout, portly exterior beat a heart as soft as any woman's.

Here the squire's voice was heard above the general din:

"Local option indeed! You can't trust townsfolk at all; they can not forget their own interests. Money-getting is the curse of the age."

Mr. Kestell's answer was distinct:

"You are a little hard, squire, on men who must make their fortune or leave their children beggars."

"Kestell's right," said George Guthrie. "We who have fixed incomes are ready enough to throw stones at floating capital."

"Still it is true that our British conversation nearly always turns upon money," remarked Hoel. "Even our literature seems saturated with it. Ten novels out of twelve turn on somebody's fortune. Love is so mixed up with gold that we begin to doubt its separate existence."

"Here you speak in Elva's fashion. Miss Kestell has always visionary ideas about regenerating man and woman, and ends by—"

"By what?" said Hoel, who had been more interested in Elva's face than he had cared to show.

"By some very commonplace finale, which shows that mortals are quite incapable of carrying out their own theories. But I must introduce her to you."

"Miss Kestell has a well-formed head. I may be wrong, but I fancy that in London she would be run after."

"For her money," added George Guthrie. "No; I

hope better things for my pupil; she and I have quarreled ever since she was five years old."

When the gentlemen trooped into the drawing-room, looking somewhat sheepish and awkward, and eager to be lost in a crowd, yet quite unable to accomplish this feat, George Guthrie drew Mr. Fenner at once toward the corner where Elva was sitting.

"Elva, let me introduce Mr. Fenner to you. He believes in all the impossibilities of life, so I expect you will agree perfectly."

"On the contrary," said Hoel, taking a chair beside her, "I have a firm faith in the possible, not the impossible; but I do strongly object to making money the theme of every novel, newspaper article, and periodical peroration."

Hoel accompanied his words with a smile, which few women ever stood out against; but he noticed, being by nature a practiced observant, that Miss Kestell's face remained cold.

"There may be many worse things than the wish to make money, I think. Some persons, who care nothing about riches, are quite as insolent as the purse-proud men who disgust one with their ostentation."

This was such a curious answer to receive from a young lady in a drawing-room, that Hoel took a yet closer scrutiny of the speaker. Yes, she was more than picturesque; the head was well posed; the gray eyes were capable of varied expression; the mobile mouth and clear complexion were all noticeable; but Elva's nose not being of any classical form, prevented her from becoming noted for beauty. However, apart from looks there was a certain passion of life in the girl which Hoel quickly noted, and which he thought very uncommon in one so young. He took the trouble of putting her crude thought into a better setting.

"You mean that insolence, not money-getting, is the sin of the age. It is a new idea, and I shall think it over."

Elva was a woman, and as such she was flattered.

"I meant something like that; but," more hotly, "I am afraid to talk to a critic. I—I see your reviews in 'The Current Reader.'"

"It's weary work reviewing novels," said Hoel, little guessing that he was heaping up the sum of his iniquity.

"I suppose it must be from the way you spoke of a novel this week."

"Which one was that?" said Hoel, smiling, in spite of himself, at this girl's energy and unconscious sarcasm.

"'An Undine of To-day.' When I read it, Mr. Fenner, I pitied that poor author. I should think you will stop all his future ideas."

"Oh, yes, I remember. But, honestly, you would not have me praise such crude work? The lady—you said his, but it is certainly a lady—must have written out of the fullness of a very young heart. You forget the sacredness of art; it is no easy thing to write a novel. And what would happen if critics praised the first daub of a would-be artist—called it equal to a Raphael?"

Elva had made the effort of appearing natural, so that it never entered Hoel's mind he was speaking to the author of the novel in question. None the less was there war in Elva's heart.

"But clever critics see the promise of future good work, and say so; at least, that is my idea of a good critic."

She had thrown down the glove in good earnest; but again she saw Hoel's aggravating smile.

"Have you read 'Amiel's Journal?' '*Plus on a de puissance intellectuelle, plus il est dangereux de mal prendre et de mal commencer la vie,*' he says in it. Well, we critics are doing a kindness in preventing people from beginning badly their literary career. Honestly, if the diamond is still in its lump of blue clay, what pleasure does the world get from it? Unless the author can wash off the clay it is better to leave the diamond in its native bed."

"Wherever it is, the diamond is a diamond."

"I see you are bent on abusing critics, Miss Kestell. I must accept some blame for our tribe; but only partially. No one can write words that will have a moral value unless they have seen life under some of its most painful aspects. I don't mean the turbulent life of society scandals; but the personal life of conflict in the region of thought. A life of suffering, spiritual suffering, may transform people whom the world call prosperous. I fancy the author of the 'Undine' has never suffered, but has crude ideas of what she calls 'the soul.' By the way, what a useful word it is in the mouth of those who have hardly any un-

derstanding of the word, and but a slight belief in the reality."

Elva was going to answer vehemently; but at this moment Mrs. Eagle Bennison tripped toward them, showing a dissolving view of her pearly teeth.

"Mr. Fenner, are you giving some of your wisdom to dear Elva? If so, I don't like asking you to spare her; but I do want her to come and sing to us. You and Amice have such charming voices. My dear, how well your father looks this evening. Such a noble head, isn't it, Mr. Fenner? Come and sing 'Dreams,' Elva."

"Not to-night. I couldn't sing," said Elva, decidedly. "Miss Akister will do it much better than I can."

"Then do open the piano for her, Mr. Fenner," added Mrs. Bennison, when Miss Akister had consented, for she decided that Elva must not monopolize the lion.

Elva remained alone, but her thoughts were busy.

"He talks beautifully; but—no, I am sure he has not suffered. I can see that in his calm, handsome face. He thinks a great deal of himself and fancies he is always right."

"Aren't you going to say anything to me?" said a voice close behind her. It was Walter Akister.

Betta, his sister, was so shy and awkward, that she seldom mixed in the society of Rushbrook, having to keep all her energies for the scientific friends of her father; but Walter, who had the misfortune to be both unpolished and queer-tempered, often strolled down to the valley and spent a good deal of time on the lawn of Rushbrook House in the summer, and on the pools during skating-time. Only George Guthrie had noticed the seeds of his admiration for Elva. Certainly she was unaware of it, and would have laughed the idea to scorn. Walter had none of the glamour in which a son of a nobleman is supposed to be usually enveloped; and as for the word lover, it was almost impossible for a girl, with any romantic tendencies, to associate it with Walter Akister; but, unfortunately, he constantly looked upon himself in this light, without having the least power of showing it. Even now, though he thought Elva looking beautiful, his tone was one of rough fellowship more than one mixed with any tender feeling.

"I can't speak across a room," said Elva, not taking the trouble even to smile.

Walter was easily repulsed, or, rather, he imagined sarcasm where none was intended. Elva had no idea of repulsing him any more than if a boy of twelve had addressed her. She did not understand his passionate nature.

"I'm going to London to-morrow, can I do anything for you? What's that fellow been saying to you?"

"Mr. Hoel Fenner is a literary man."

Elva did not quite like Walter Akister's tone.

"They're all such conceited stuck-up people."

"Please don't talk, there's your sister beginning to sing."

Walter moved away with a frown on his face. He was angry with Elva and angry with himself, and yet he could not accuse her of anything unusual. Amice always listened to him patiently, but Elva never pretended to encourage his visits.

The party broke up early, Mr. Kestell being the first to make a move, as he could bring forward a delicate wife as an excuse. In the hall Elva found Mr. Fenner standing close by her to help her with her wraps, while the vicar was enveloping his sister in sundry shawls as they were walking home. While waiting for the carriage, Hoel again admired Mr. Kestell's noble head. No wonder, thought he, that his daughter is so good-looking. Elva meant to keep silence, but her father remarked:

"I shall be delighted if Mr. Heaton will bring you to see our views, that is, if you are making any stay here."

Elva softly stamped her foot with impatience. How very tiresome her father was to ask this stranger!

"Thank you, but my stay is short here; still, I think I have seldom seen a prettier neighborhood. It combines, as a guide-book would say, 'perfect nature and perfect art.'"

"Then you are not entirely in love with pavements?"

"No, indeed, I used to live in the country as a boy, but one gets accustomed to one's surroundings. Still, I know some country fellows who can not get reconciled to London. I made the acquaintance of one a little while ago; he is very clever, and is mastering all sorts of things in his spare time, which can only be of use to him in London, and yet he told me the craving for country life was his greatest hinderance."

"I should like to know that man," said Elva, forgetting her wrath. "I could never bear to live in London."

"By the way, I think Jesse Vicary said he came from this county."

"Jesse Vicary! We know him quite well, his sister is—"

"Elva, here is the carriage, make haste," said Mr. Kestell, quickly drawing his daughter away, so that Hoel could only bow and turn away.

Elva, once comfortably seated by her father's side, put her arm through his, and fell into a meditation, so she did not notice Mr. Kestell's unusual silence.

Outside the beautiful valley was bathed in soft light, every now and then the overhanging trees plunged them into deep shadow; then, when they emerged into a clearing, they could see the glimmer of the silent pools they were passing.

"Papa, isn't Rushbrook a perfect place? can you wonder that Jesse Vicary pines for it?"

There was no answer, and Elva turned quickly toward her father; his face expressed deep thought, and he did not seem to have heard her.

"Papa, what are you thinking of? Don't ask Mr. Hoel Fenner to Rushbrook. I don't like him."

Mr. Kestell was now all attention.

"I beg your pardon, dear. I was thinking of something Lord Cartmel wanted done for him. Mr. Hoel Fenner, oh, certainly not, I do not much care about these literary lions; they suit Mrs. Eagle Bennison, however."

Mr. Kestell laughed, and Elva wondered why his laugh sounded a little joyless.

"Poor old dad, you are tired; you hate parties. Well, here is our own dear pool."

"And make haste to bed, child, so as not to lose your roses and become as pale as Amice. Good-night."

CHAPTER III.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

Mr. Kestell stood still a moment in the dimly lighted hall when Elva had gone upstairs. Jones was folding up the carriage-rug, and did not notice him till he was sur-

prised by being addressed in a very impatient manner; for certainly the master was not usually hasty of speech.

"The fire is out in the sitting-room, Jones. Why was it not kept up?"

"There is a good fire in your own study, sir. I didn't know—there were no orders."

Mr. Kestell was himself again in a moment.

"Ah, yes; of course that is all right. Don't sit up any longer, Jones. I have a little work to do, so if you hear any noise, you need not be alarmed."

Jones said: "Thank you, sir," and walked away, not before he had noticed that his master's face looked white and drawn.

Mr. Kestell walked quickly across the hall, opened his study-door, and closed it softly behind him. His moment of impatience was quickly over, and Jones decided that his master had eaten something indigestible at dinner.

"It's all show at Mr. Heagle Bennison's," muttered the butler; "here it's solid worth from the beef to the cream. Some bad cooking has made master cross-tempered; him as is usually as mild as milk."

Mr. Kestell looked round his study, as if he expected to see some one seated there. In reality he was hardly conscious of his own actions as he put his hand in his pocket, and went and stood by the fireside. The bright flames flickered and crackled cheerfully, and sent their reflected light upon the long, white hair of that venerable head.

Everything in the room spoke of comfort and unostentatious luxury—that luxury which refreshes the mind instead of oppressing it. But the glances of Josiah Kestell remained uneasy, unsatisfied, as he glanced occasionally round him. He was thinking of the future.

"Elva and Amice are well provided for, and there will be a handsome jointure for poor Celia. I have worked hard for it—no one can deny that, say what they will—but I kept my word. Celia has never wanted anything, neither have the girls. They must marry young. I hate society; but, for their sake, I must exert myself to have more company here. Not tuft-hunters, but honest men, who will look after them. Elva is impulsive, but she is easily led by affection. She and I understand each other; she will do as I like." A smile of intense affection seemed to pass over his face and disappear again, like a wintery

gleam before rain. "But Amice," he continued, "I can not understand her. She is full of Quixotic ideas. The sooner she learns to give up her own will to a husband the better."

The name of Amice, however, brought no proud smile to his lips. Little as it had appeared, Mr. Kestell had noted the look of fear on his daughter's face as she had come down-stairs.

"Afraid of me," he continued, mentally. "Amice afraid of me! And yet I have never been harsh to her; not even when she sits still, and looks me through with those blue eyes of hers. She does it to everybody now—a terribly bad habit to get into. But Elva sees no faults in her sister; she would be shocked if I mentioned it. How foolish I am this evening! What was it? . . . Yes; it was that Hoel Fenner. Well, well, a mere accident. It is quite impossible, quite."

And Mr. Kestell, of Greystone, who was so much respected and trusted by all the county, went on pacing his study as if he were on the brink of bankruptcy, instead of being one of the most wealthy man in the county; but riches alone can not always make quiet hearts.

This long meditation was evidently a very unusual proceeding, for, when the clock struck one, Mr. Kestell paused and felt annoyed with himself at having sat up so late. Lighting a candle, set in a massive silver candlestick, he softly opened the door for fear of waking any of the household. He stepped very quietly up the oak staircase. The tall clock on the stairs was behind time, and, just as the master was passing, its internal machinery began making a weird noise preparatory to striking. Mr. Kestell glanced up and noted the staring face of the representative sun, peeping up above the two round hemispheres at the top of the dial. This face had a wicked look in its eyes, and it seemed to ask Kestell of Greystone what he meant by walking about at this late hour. Mr. Kestell, turning away impatiently from the deriding eyes, seemed inclined to quarrel with the foolish solar representation which some quaint fancy of the fifteenth century had taken a pride in depicting.

"I must get those works mended," thought Mr. Kestell, passing on quickly. "That idiotic sun has got stuck,

and it is always in the same place, now I come to think of it. It is years since I saw the moon."

Very softly he trod; for, of course, every one was asleep at Rushbrook House. His wife could not bear to be disturbed, so he was going to his own room. To accomplish this, he had to pass the doors of his daughters' rooms. The first was Elva's. Here all was still, dark; but what was Mr. Kestell's astonishment when he perceived a thin streak of light issuing from below the door? Amice was then still up; or had she by chance left the candle alight? Mr. Kestell had a nervous dread of fire, so he paused and listened. At first he heard no sound, then suddenly a soft rustle, as of a woman's sweeping skirt. Next, a gentle footstep, as if Amice were approaching the door. Was she going to open it, and stand before him with her great blue eyes? It may sound strange and unnatural; but the mind of man is so curiously complex, that what appears to ordinary understanding odd, would, if we knew the many paths which the brain traverses before it reaches action, look perfectly natural. At this moment an uncontrollable terror of his own child seized hold of Mr. Kestell; and, not pausing to see if his imaginary picture were going to be realized, he hurried away, and, without looking back, he entered his own room and locked the door with a noisy bang.

The next day the Kestell household awoke to its ordinary routine. Breakfast was at nine, and at a quarter to ten the carriage usually drove round to take the master to the station. Punctuality was a mania with Mr. Kestell; and by dint of gentle reproof he had succeeded in making his daughters and his servants punctual. His wife was past all reform. It had remained impressed on her mind that it was the mark of good breeding to care nothing about time; and now she still clung to this tradition, and came down at uncertain hours. Symee spent the whole morning in taking and receiving messages to various persons in the house from Mrs. Kestell; happily the girl had naturally a sweet temper, or she would long ago have preferred to beg her bread than perform her tiresome duties. Gratitude also helped her; for Mr. Kestell had saved her and her brother Jesse from the work-house. She had been told that her grandmother had died when she and her twin brother were but babies in arms. Mr. Kestell had generously stepped forward, paid all the debts, and undertaken

to support the orphans. Could such kindness ever be forgotten? thought Symee, over and over again, as she bore all Mrs. Kestell's fidgets. Mr. Kestell had done even more for Jesse than for her. He had got him into a free grammar-school where the teaching was excellent; and the boy having proved worthy of help, Mr. Kestell had procured him a clerk's stool in a merchant's office. His salary was small, but his hopes were great. What cheerful letters he wrote to his sister; and what golden visions he placed before her on paper! till Symee felt that all her troubles were worth bearing for the sake of her future life with Jesse. This very morning Symee had had one of these epistles containing these words:

"When I am rich enough, Symee dear, you will come and live with me, and we shall get on first rate. But we must never forget that we owe our happiness to one man, the best, the kindest man on earth. For Mr. Kestell's sake, dear, put up with the worries you tell me of. Miss Amice, Heaven bless her for it, is always good to you, you say; but you shall not always be a servant. I am very ambitious, but it is for your sake, and also—something within me seems to urge me on to do my best, and I do not think this is wrong. When I see the people round me wasting some of their best powers—for some of these poor men are very clever, but can not keep from drink—then I feel that God will require our talents of us, and that He will show us a picture of what we might have been, and ask us to answer for what we are. Yes, you and I are the children of honest, if poor people, Symee; but we have had many blessings to answer for, and yet we, too, may hear some day the 'Well done.' A little while ago I made the acquaintance of a literary gentleman, who promises me some delightful work. Will he remember? I liked his face, and I saw at once the wide difference between him and a man like me. He seemed to know everything without being aware that he knew it. He looked to me like a bit of highly polished steel, and I felt like just a bar of pig-iron. But, anyhow, there's work in this big world for both of us. I don't mean to get discouraged when I study my neighbors. Sometimes I feel like the man whose head is weak, and who is standing on the top of a high tower; the feeling comes over him to throw himself down. Well, here it's the same in another sort of way. Why should one keep walking

upward? Why not finish the struggle, and cast one's self down? God forgive me the thought, but it comes. Why am I telling you all this, Symee? I have no one else to write out my thoughts to; and it does me good at times; though even to you I couldn't write all that a man here has to go through. But there's the blessed work. It was not a curse God gave, but a blessing, when He said that we were to work. Oh! if we could get this idea well into our minds. Good-bye; if I hear any more of Mr. Hoel Fenner—that's the gentleman's name—I'll tell you. He says I might in time do good work with my short-hand and my writing."

Symee had read this epistle, while snatching a few mouthfuls of late breakfast. And just at that moment Jones looked solemnly into the housekeeper's room.

"Miss Vicary, please, the master wants you in his private study at once."

Symee folded up her precious letter, and hurried to Mr. Kestell's room, blushing from shyness. When she heard the words, "Come in," and saw her benefactor's benign face, she was soon reassured.

"I won't detain you long, Symee," he began, kindly. "I wanted to know if you had heard from your brother lately; and how is he getting on? I thought—"

He paused, and Symee filled up the pause.

"Oh, sir, he's doing very well. It's hard work, of course, and he has to be careful; but in time he'll get on, I know he will. And Jesse would rather starve than get into debt, and bring discredit on you, sir, who have been so kind—"

"That's nothing—nothing at all, Symee. I was glad to help him. Of course, there were expenses when you were both young, but I never grudged them. I spent the original sum that—that I had put away for that purpose. You have nothing to complain of, have you, Symee? Nothing you wish altered?"

Symee's whole soul seemed filled and overflowing with gratitude; not for all the world would she have mentioned any of her troubles, had these been greater even than they were.

"Oh, no, no, sir. You have been so good to me and Jesse."

"Tut, tut; you are a good girl, Symee. You have much influence with your twin brother. It is very natural;

a woman is older for her years than a man at your age. Use your influence well, Symee. For instance, if Jesse should wish to—try some other walk in life, remind him that a rolling stone gathers no moss; but, as all young men have aspirations, tell him, from me, Symee, that I shall always be glad to hear his plans. I don't wish to dictate to him, but I think I may justly expect to be kept informed of his doings. Strangers may take him in; they may lead him on for their own purposes, and then deceive him."

Symee was at once filled with anxiety.

"Do you think so, sir? Only this morning Jesse was telling me of a gentleman who was going to help him. A Mr. Hoel Fenner. Shall I tell him to have nothing to do with him?"

Symee at first doubted if she ought to betray her brother's confidence; but was not Mr. Kestell, as he said, entitled to know everything about them both?

Mr. Kestell put out his hand and carefully tidied some letters on his table.

"I don't say that, mind, Symee. I say nothing. I only wish to give you a general warning."

"Oh, sir, Jesse is ambitious. That is what I am afraid of; and it is for my sake, I know."

"You are a very sensible girl, Symee. Keep your brother out of mischief. Let him stick to Card & Lilley's office, and, though he may not get very rich, still he will rise slowly and surely. Your brother's address is the same, I suppose, 21 Golden Sparrow Street? Well, that will do, Symee. You are quite satisfied, and wish for nothing?"

Again a blush, expressing her love and gratitude, and, with a modest courtesy, Symee retired as she said:

"Oh, no, sir. I wish for nothing. I am quite happy."

Symee spent the little leisure she had that day in writing back to her brother, and, after two pages of affection and hopes, she added:

"Dear Jesse,—Do not be ambitious for my sake. If you were to get too clever you might no longer care about your stupid sister. When we live together I will do all I can to make you happy; but I don't want you to get above your station. God made us poor, and if it had not been for Mr. Kestell, we should be work-house children. He

said to-day, 'Tell Jesse "a rolling stone gathers no moss," and don't trust strange gentlemen, who may deceive you.' Mr. Kestell asked me how you were getting on, and he seems anxious you should keep steady in Card & Lilley's office. Think of Mr. Kestell, who has never got tired of befriending us. I do often when I get worried with Mrs. Kestell's fidgets. Miss Amice was so kind to me last night, and cured my headache. It seemed like an angel touching me. Miss Elva is good too; but one is never sure of her. She has high thoughts, but Miss Amice lives up to them. She said you were to mind and come and see me when you can get a holiday. She will make it easy for us to be together; so do come. I shall count the days till then. Your loving sister,

"SYMEE."

Jesse Vicary received this letter when he was just preparing to sit down to his study of German translation. Clerks who knew foreign languages had a better chance of getting on; and with a sort of dogged perseverance Jesse had courageously begun, and meant to master the difficulties. He had a room in a small lodging-house, and a tiny dressing-room adjoining, where he slept. This constituted the only home Jesse Vicary knew; for all his life he had been at the mercy of the fitful kindness of strangers. He was not unhappy here; on the contrary, he seemed to breathe freely in this dingy place when he came home in the evening.

Not very tall, but well made, was Jesse, with curling chestnut hair of a very unusual shade, deep-set hazel eyes, and a refinement of action which was all the more noticeable because his figure might have been improved with drilling and better-cut clothes. If one stopped to define what it was that made one single out Jesse Vicary from a host of young clerks, one would have said that it was the easy simplicity of his manner and speech. In spite of his hidden ambition, he was not in the least pretentious in manner, for he was himself. He did not pretend to be anything more than a clerk in a merchant's office, receiving a small salary, neither did he wish to impose any other personality on those who spoke to him. Yet there was a curious, unconscious power about him, which in spite of outward circumstances impressed itself on strangers who met

him; and Hoel Fenner had noticed this, and had been struck without explaining the cause to himself. There are some men and women, though fewer of the latter, who, once seen, can never be forgotten. They may have no great talents, may have made no great name in the world, and yet for all that they are true units in a world where the tendency is to gregariousness; and their undefinable power seems to assert itself in spite of all surroundings, in spite of brilliant competitors, and in spite of the crushing, dull uniformity of their lives.

'Liza, the maid-of-all-work at No. 21 Golden Sparrow Street, shuffled up with a grin on her face to give Mr. Vicary his letter. Even 'Liza would rather work for him than for any of the other lodgers; but she had also the tie of coming from the same neighborhood.

"Thank you, 'Liza," he said, politely, and the girl happily shuffled back to the lower regions, like some goblin of fairy lore.

Even to touch Symee's letter did him good, and sent a new thrill of courage through his frame. Some day she would be sitting by his fireside, and he would have a sister near him on whom to expend some of the great love which must live in great hearts.

To-day, however, he heaved a little sigh of disappointment, when he had finished the letter. Symee could not understand his aspirations. The spirit of servitude was crushing out her free will. She mistook honest pride for presumption; she feared to hope.

Then he read the letter again, and a feeling of annoyance arose at Mr. Kestell's advice; but Jesse crushed the feeling as soon as it appeared. Mr. Kestell was quite right from his point of view. How could he understand what his feelings were? And, after all, though he would always be grateful for the past, at present Mr. Kestell was doing nothing for him or Symee. Both worked hard enough, Heaven knew, and the future depended on themselves.

"I will shape out our lives as far as I may," he thought, "and you must let me have my own way, dear, good little Symee. You don't know your own worth; you want me to teach it to you. But some day we will look the world bravely in the face and defy it to do its worst."

It was a bold challenge to throw down, and, happily, as Jesse opened his book and set to work, he did not realize

what he was willing to face. Something of the Luther spirit was in him, as well as much of that womanly tenderness which often characterizes earth's noblest men.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MOOR.

THE autumn wind was on the moor; and Elva, who had climbed up from Rushbrook Mills toward the Beacon, sat down on a stile for the pleasure of feeling the air about her, and gazed at the thousand pictures around her, which, full as she was of the poetic spirit, she could enjoy with an enjoyment as intense as it was real. By her ran the gray, sandy road which divided the great belt of firs which stretched itself up-hill and down-hill for a mile or two from the Beacon. It was a perfect day; the fresh breeze lifted and swayed all that came in its way, from the soft, round, gray shadow-clouds to the tops of the tall fir-trees, and, lower than that, to the delicate, flowering grasses of every description. On the side of the road by which Elva had chosen her stile, there was a sweep of open moorland, where the heather, the ling, and the gorse all struggled for supremacy. But just here none had gained the victory, for all the grasses were in leaf and flower, or in fruit and seed, and exhibited hues, varying from the dull yellow of withered age, to the green and brown, russet and purple of their various kinds. Beyond these, the bracken and the thistle put in their sturdy appearance, while the burdock, in flower of richest red and light-green leaf, contrasted well with the purple scabious, on many a head of which a bumble-bee was happily balancing itself, making the flower that gave up its honey bend beneath the weight of the spoiler.

This, and much more, Elva looked on while making a vision of her future life, as all young, eager souls do at some time or other.

"Papa will be just a little particular, but if I coax him he will think his future son-in-law perfection, I know he will; and Amice will declare he is not good enough; and mamma will think the wedding preparations a great trouble; and I—well, he and I will be above all common ideas of ordinary people. We shall trust each other, and share all our ideas, and he will encourage me to write good

novels, or perhaps poetry; and he will love Rushbrook as much as I do. Our wedding will be different from that of ordinary people; we will just go to St. John's and be married on an early summer morning, when this dear moor will be all over gossamer veils, and Amice will be there as my bride-maid. Of course, Amice will never marry. I can't fancy any one making love to her. Yet, perhaps, on an autumn day like this, some very saintly person might come—" And then Elva hummed a verse she had read that morning:

" 'How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff
And his sandle shoon.

Yes, Amice's love will wear a cockle hat and sandle-shoon!"

Something in her own happiness recalled to her the dinner-party at Court Garden, and Hoel Fenner's words:

"No one can write a novel who has not seen life under some of its most painful aspects."

Elva thought of her own untroubled existence, and impatiently crossed her arms.

"No; I suppose I have not suffered; but I can love. And I could love with all my heart. When I am married my husband will understand my ideas, and he won't call them 'crude,' like that horrid Mr. Hoel Fenner. How I hate that word, and him for saying it!"

She jumped off the stile, and knelt down on the moor to pick a few wild flowers for Amice. How exquisite was the scent of all these heath treasures; how lovely life and nature were! Earth seemed so fair, so full of possibilities to this girl, that, even as she felt a little hurt that sorrow had not taught her anything, she also rejected it as a dumb creature turns away from poisoned food.

So busy was she, seeking for tiny flowers, that she did not hear the faint sound of footsteps on the sandy road close by, till George Guthrie's voice startled her and made her jump up.

"Why, here is *La Belle Dame sans Merci!* Elva! I thought that at this time of the morning young ladies had avocations in-doors."

Elva blushed from anger, for walking with George was her enemy, Hoel Fenner.

"I was gathering wild thyme and flowers Amice likes best. I should have thought that it would have been men who had morning avocations."

She laughed to hide her feeling of annoyance; but George Guthrie was discerning.

"Now, Elva, you are displeased, I see, because you fancy the whole moorland is yours. I was taking Mr. Fenner for a walk up to the top of the Beacon; but, seeing you, we turned aside. Mr. Fenner, judge between Miss Kestell and myself—has she a right to be angry? As to her title, well, that was given some time ago because she is so hard on the race called man, and fancies the masculine gender altogether a poor creature."

Elva could not help laughing, and Hoel was struck with the warm glow of life that characterized Miss Kestell.

"If I am *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, then you are certainly 'the wretched wight,' George."

"So haggard and so woe-begone," quoted Hoel, surprised at this country girl's quickness of rejoinder, for he was fast slipping into the idea that only a Londoner has sharp wit. As he spoke, he scrutinized the *Belle Dame*. After all, candle-light had not improved her beauty. She seemed almost perfect now, with her surroundings of pure nature. Here she fitted in like a jewel, replaced in its original setting. As he noted all this, however, Hoel was angry with himself for being interested in a girl, who, he had been told, would have heaps of money, and he almost wished this loquacious Guthrie had not been so communicative.

He again noted her impetuous nature, which seemed clearly depicted in every outline of her head and neck. If she wanted something, he thought, she would walk through fire for it, and be angry if she were singed in the process. Yes, she was an interesting study, and interesting studies were part of his stock-in-trade.

"When we met, two nights ago," he said, "you were angry with the whole tribe of critics. Have you forgiven them now, or are we still in disgrace?"

"I do not change quickly," said Elva, showing much more displeasure than the occasion required, or so it seemed to Hoel. "I should think that English criticism is done on a wrong system altogether."

"Well done, Elva," said Mr. Guthrie, laughing heartily;

"just like you to sweep everything away if not quite to your mind. What a pity women are not yet in Parliament!"

Elva's blush was beautiful just then. Hoel quite forgave the sinner who had called it up.

"How can you say that? You know you despise women. All men do, more or less."

"What a rash statement! Pray name one, my dear Elva."

A quick smile made the girl's face a picture, that fitted in beautifully with the rich color of the landscape around her, and the chasing lights and shadows of the great moorland.

She turned toward the two men, and said, quite earnestly and simply:

"It is not difficult to name Mr. Hoel Fenner."

If Elva had been coy or shy, or weak or diminutive in mind or body, Hoel would not have been the worse for that clear, steadfast gaze. As it was, he was conscious that the glove she was throwing down with such aggressiveness was a dangerous thing for him to pick up. He knew he should retain the picture of that moor, of that girl, for a long time. However, most men do things they regret afterward; and, clear-sighted as Hoel Fenner was, he recognized that some of his danger lay in the fact that he accepted the challenge, not because he loved at first sight, which he was incapable of doing, but because he was conscious of a mixture of admiration and counter-aggressiveness.

"May I ask if Mr. Hoel Fenner despises women more, or less?" said the accused, looking at his accuser's face.

"More, much more than most men, I should say."

"Pray don't contradict her, Fenner. I assure you, as in the case of more important people, it's dangerous."

"You know I despise people who agree with me from politeness," and Elva broke off the head of a tall grass.

"Then let me avoid that danger, and say I disagree with you," said Hoel, smiling. "I consider that a literary man is only too glad to lose sight of the difference between man and woman when he can."

At this moment George Guthrie saw a young carter coming slowly down the road from the Beacon; and, as he knew every man and woman and child on his cousin's es-

tate and in the village, he could not resist the chance of a talk.

"There's Caleb Joyce, Elva; have it out with the critic while I say two words to the lad. I'll be back in a minute, Mr. Fenner," and off he went.

Left alone, the two suddenly seemed to lose the spirit of antagonism which a moment before was so strong; and for a few seconds both gazed out at the scene, which in its way could hardly be surpassed for loveliness. In front of them, looking away from the Beacon, an upland meadow lay spread out, the stillness of it being marred only by the eager crows; and beyond again, far above the tops of the grand fir-trees, stretched the long, high table-land ridge, known as the Forest of Alden, where, at intervals, the almost straight line was broken by solitary clumps of thinly grown firs, each clump having its local name, and serving as special landmarks to many a lonely village. The very width and breadth of this landscape seemed to elevate the minds of those who could appreciate what they saw; and Hoel Fenner, whose mind had been more formed by books than by nature, partially realized how much it must have influenced a girl like Miss Kestell. It was Elva who spoke first.

"Mr. Guthrie is so very kind-hearted and so odd. He really knows more about the poor people than even our clergyman, Mr. Heaton. It's strange, but he really finds pleasure in talking to them about their rheumatism and their pains and aches."

"And you think men are not given to sympathy?"

"Oh, no; except about their own ailments," and Elva's laugh was infectious. "But, then, Mr. Guthrie is very idle; he never would go in for any profession, and much prefers pottering. Now, if I were a man, I should like a more useful life. I would reform evils and work on a large scale, and not waste time in gossiping with the poor."

"I have never yet settled in my mind what is waste of time. Jesse Vicary, for instance, seems to spend much energy in learning German, and French, and short-hand. I doubt whether he will ever derive much money profit out of all this."

"How curious you should have made friends with our Symee's brother! Papa takes so much interest in them.

He saved them from the work-house when they were tiny children."

"And what is the sister like?"

"Oh! Symee acts as our maid, and is as good as gold, and very gentle; but she is not of a very original turn of mind."

Hoel Fenner was interested in the speaker, and so affected interest in the maid.

"And you would prefer an original maid? It seems to me that her name, at least, is not ordinary."

"Papa does not like it. He tried to change it once; but Jesse Vicary took it so much to heart that my sister declared we must continue to call her Symee. I suppose it was her mother's name; but I never thought about it as being original. I think Amice said the mother was Cornish. She likes poor people nearly as much as George Guthrie. I don't. I never can think what to say to them."

Hoel agreed with her, and admired the frankness of the admission.

"Anyhow, all poor men are not like this Vicary. The little I saw of him impressed me much. I made out a theory that he must have had good antecedents; but you say he was only a poor man's son."

Elva, too, was interested. She forgot the critic in the talker.

"Oh, yes; quite poor people. I believe they lived in a little village on the other side of the Crow's Nest—that's the most distant clump you see out there. Then I think I heard papa say once that the grandmother took a little cottage on the Beacon just before her death."

"I think Vicary has an interesting psychological history."

"How do you mean?"

"I fancy he believes in Christianity in a way which reminds one of the mediæval mind."

"But doesn't every one believe in Christianity?"

"Yes, as a fact; but few believe it in all its spiritual parts."

Elva almost said, as she looked up at Hoel: "Do you?" But she changed the words to:

"We country people believe in a good, old-fashioned style, I suppose. We never question our belief, or examine

it; I suppose if we did we should get puzzled. My sister Amice would not, however; she is very unlike other people; she tries to carry out her religion in a literal sense which my mother thinks very inconvenient. It is tiresome sometimes, but I never question it, because if Amice thinks a thing right, she does it all the more if one opposes her: besides, I think all Amice does is right, though we are so different."

The intense reality of her words fell like pleasant music on the ears of the man who, up to this time, had never had a very intense affection, because he had been so much engaged in polishing the bright diamond called Hoel Fenner.

"You are willing to agree and disagree with your sister: that is a very pleasant relationship."

Elva saw George Guthrie coming back, and she at once felt she had been too communicative with the critic.

"I don't give names to my feelings."

"But you will allow me to admire your loyalty to her?"

"Oh, I don't know: 'there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so.' It's no use analyzing: it only results in failure."

Poor Elva was thinking of "An Undine of To-day," little guessing that though her book had appeared uninteresting to Hoel, the living study was most engaging. Here was a country girl who had had no season in town, no special advantages, and yet who could express her thoughts well, and with a dash of originality. He could not help thinking of her future, as we sometimes do with regard to those strangers who come suddenly into our lives, and who may themselves be passing over the threshold into a strange world of events.

"She will marry a money-bag or a spendthrift—that young Akister, perhaps—and her originality will be smothered by a conventional society."

So reasoned the philosopher, as George Guthrie came up full of a new idea.

"I have been hearing of Caleb Joyce's little sister 'Liza. She's in London, and isn't it queer, Elva?—your protégée—Vicary—is there. Caleb says she's a deal of tramping to do, and very little victuals. And he summed up her grievances by saying: 'Why, sir, up there, they be just like a lot of furreners.'"

"Poor people get very queer ideas of life," smiled Hoel.

"I can match them with the rich, I assure you! What do you think happened this morning, my dear Elva? After breakfast my cousin was reading a heap of little pamphlets about good societies. She keeps a special paper basket full of them, and I sometimes amuse myself with reading their titles. Well, in comes Groves. 'If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Joliff—she's the poultry woman—has sent to ask for some port wine for the chickens that got numbed last night.' My good cousin looks up quite pathetically, for her husband had gone off to the Board. 'Your master has left some port wine with you, Groves, I know. You can send that.' But Groves looked horribly woe-begone. 'Yes, 'm; but that was only the poor people's port wine. I don't know whether that would d-o-o-o.' 'No, perhaps not, Groves. Take a little out of our decanter.' Exit Groves."

The whole tone and the diversified accents of George Guthrie were so comical, that both his hearers laughed heartily, though Elva added:

"Don't tell Amice that story, she takes things so literally. Mrs. Eagle Bennison meant no harm."

"Harm! I think not. She was quite unconscious of any but the best intentions. Every one knows that bad port won't hurt a poor man, neither will it restore the circulation of a chicken. Comparisons are, of course, odious; but one has to make them sometimes."

"I must go home," said Elva, suddenly.

During Mr. Guthrie's explanation, Hoel had been picking some beautiful gentians near by, which his quick eye had suddenly discovered. He came back and handed them to Elva.

"Will you accept these, Miss Kestell? To my town eyes they look beautiful and rare."

Elva took them with a cold "Thank you," and the sudden gravity, almost frown, on her bright face was evident.

Hoel was puzzled by the sudden change, and, as he and Mr. Guthrie walked on up the moor, he felt half nettled and half sorry he had given the flowers. Some instinct made him glance back, unseen by George Guthrie, who was leading the way, and to his mortification he saw Elva Kestell fling his gentians away with a determined, impetuous action which clearly expressed dislike of the giver. True, she did not know she was seen; indeed, there was no

doubt the action was the result of some quick thought, but Hoel felt a glow of hurt pride at the very idea of being disliked. He had fancied he had made an impression on Elva, as he was accustomed to do on women in general. She had certainly interested him, or something more. Even now he would have liked to have asked her why she disliked him. In all natures with a vein of vanity in them there is a painful shrinking back from being disliked without sufficient reason; and, strange inconsistency of human nature, it was Elva's action, her contempt of his gift, and therefore of himself, which resulted in the birth of the idea: "She can not understand me; but she shall some day like me." To himself Hoel said no more; but there is an inner consciousness deeper than that represented by thought, the expression of which is like a picture formed by misty clouds; and from this mist Hoel saw unfolded the thought: "She shall love me!"

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF HIS ELEMENT.

CAN any of us be sure that along the path of life's daily routine we are not journeying to some great convulsion of our outward circumstances, or of our inward spiritual thought? Sometimes coming events, we are told, cast their shadows before them; we are seized with a dread that has no apparent cause, or we are urged to action by some unrecognized agency. Men or women of the world we may be, skeptics or believers, spiritually or carnally minded, and yet to all, at special moments, there comes a great feeling of overshadowing mystery; other worlds are round us, and we peer vainly about us, trying to solve the riddle of life.

Hoel had not again seen Elva; his visit had terminated the next morning, and for some days he had been firmly settled in his luxurious bachelor quarters.

Here he felt superior to circumstances. He was not wealthy, but wanted nothing he could not procure. In the dim background he even occasionally contemplated an inheritance from his uncle, Mellish Fenner, who lived laborious days in doing nothing; but this inheritance Hoel despised, and did not reckon on it, or professed not to do so. Still, in his present condition, Hoel knew that he could

not marry unless his wife were rich, and he was above hunting for riches.

Hoel had so many virtues, that it was difficult for his sins to find him out. He was high-minded in thought, word, and deed; he was handsome; he was very clever, and possessed fine literary and critical faculty, which promised to make him a prince among critics. Several journals had already found this out, and only did not proclaim it for fear of rousing competition. Moreover, he had a just estimate of himself, which, on the one hand, prevented him from being conceited, and on the other from underestimating his powers, and therefore rendering them less useful to him. But Hoel was overrefined with that overrefinement which, though not in the least effeminate, seems slowly to kill the more rugged excellence which, for want of a better word, we may call a grand character.

Everything about Hoel Fenner helped this overrefinement to increase—that delightful sitting-room, furnished with exquisite taste, where he often gave afternoon tea to cousins, and cousins' cousins, and literary ladies and their friends; the dining-room, which was also his library, fitted with the best in literature, ancient and modern, not forgetting a row for individual taste, and which spoke well of the man. Yes, in Hoel's lodgings, from the butler to the books, everything was perfect; and the owner preferred his rooms to the Johnstonian Club, where pleasant men talked literary shop-gossip. Lately Hoel Fenner had been taking the work of the literary editor at "The Current Reader's" office. It was here he had come across Jesse Vicary, who had gone there to ask for reporting work; and Hoel had been attracted to him by that undefinable something which he possessed, and which Hoel vaguely felt was wanting in himself.

Such was Hoel Fenner; and yet, though we have placed one hand on the weak spot, most of his friends and acquaintances would have rejected the idea of any imperfection in their hero.

As one of his friends said: "Hoel Fenner is a first-rate fellow; will make his mark—and a good deep dent it will be. No conceit, either, about him. Pity he doesn't marry, for there are so many girls ready to have him."

But Hoel had never given a chance to any of the many

girls ready to have him. Men called him prudent; women liked him because "*Il ne faisait pas des jalous;*" and yet any one looking deeper down below this perfect evenness of temperament, this perfect control of passion—if this word control can be used about something which gave him so little trouble—would have seen that all this betokened a want in his character.

Hoel had no family ties; that perhaps partly accounted for his defect. He had been left an orphan quite young, but Mellish Fenner had done his duty, and had looked upon his nephew as his adopted son. Hoel had responded gladly, even nobly, to this call. His uncle had nothing to complain of, but just as he was going to college, Mellish Fenner had told his nephew that if he continued to give him satisfaction, he should inherit his fortune. Mr. Fenner put that "if" just to satisfy his love of power; to himself he said it was for Hoel's good; and in one sense it answered its purpose. Hoel's pride rose with a bound. He would be independent of all "ifs;" he would earn his own fortune, and his uncle Mellish might, if he chose, leave his money to the London Hospital. On the other hand, that "if" caused Hoel to see clearly that his uncle was selfish, and from henceforth the courtesy he showed to the invalid came no more from love, but from a sense of superiority. He, Hoel, would never be selfish or exacting in this manner; he would not try to bind others to him by false ties; in fact, he would not be at all like his uncle Mellish, but like a much higher caste of being—namely, Hoel Fenner.

Mellish Fenner never found out this reasoning, he only noted that Hoel was more and more praiseworthy; that he succeeded in all he undertook; and that, though he was now obliged to live in London, he was just as courteous and attentive when he ran down to Hastings to see him. The less Hoel required the money, the more his uncle determined he should have it; but he could never bring himself to say: "Hoel, I am going to make my will in your favor." That bit of power over a younger and stronger life was too sweet to the old man.

At this time, therefore, Hoel was determined not to believe in Uncle Mellish's fortune, and he took great pains not to show increased tenderness for the poor hypochondriac, for fear it should be imagined that he was thinking of his money. And so those two who might have bestowed

untold blessings on each other failed, just because that little word "if" had never been retracted.

This long explanation is needed to show both the greatness and the weakness of Hoel; but to-day, as he sat in his easy-chair over a small fire, he felt that since his return to town he had not been quite the same man. Something had ruffled the perfect evenness of his lake's surface, and that something was Elva Kestell!

Against his will he could see her with that glorious background of moorland; he could trace the tall figure; he could again look with pleasure at that glow of health, of youth, and passion of life which he had never seen before in any young woman. Crude as was her mind, she possessed that touch of the natural which made him, Hoel Fenner, with all his polish, recognize in her a true sketch from nature, not a highly finished painting where much of the eternal truth has been improved away by bare imitation. Elva was a rugged sketch, true, if unfinished.

"But why did she throw away my flowers? Has she foolish ideas about not accepting flowers? No, that did not seem at all probable."

There was no answer to this question, and, feeling impatient at finding something he could not solve, Hoel took up a novel which had to be reviewed. It was weary work, but he was conscientious. He believed that criticism required the best from him; that the object was to advance art and not to display the reviewer's stilted sayings, which any tyro knows are merely a matter of habit. If he abused a book he did so believing that the author ought to be taught something or else choked off; but even honest reviewers are mortal, and this evening he felt so much disinclined to do his work that presently he threw down the book and put off the evil hour.

From Elva his mind naturally strayed to Vicary. It was strange that he should just have hit upon the people who knew his early history—very strange. He opened his pocket-book and looked out his address. It was far away from St. Anselm Street; but Hoel remembered he had promised to call if any work turned up, and, as it so happened that the sub-editor of "The Current Reader" wanted a short-hand writer to take down a particular lecture, Hoel decided that this should be his excuse for going

out this evening, and, having finished his cigar, he went forth.

"That was a fine piece of philanthropy," he thought, "on the part of Mr. Kestell. It's not often that attempts of this kind answer, however; but when one succeeds in raising a fellow-creature from the lowest state to one far superior, the reward must be great. Some day I think I shall try the experiment. It's a modern craze, and it's the fashion to din the poor into one's ears. Now, if one had a specimen ready to show, one would have paid toll to fashionable philanthropy. Yes, some day I shall look out for this specimen."

At present, the thought of this future good deed quite satisfied Hoel; but it did not prevent him from having to overcome a certain mental and physical repugnance when 'Liza ushered him up the dark, airless, and not overclean staircase of No. 21 Golden Sparrow Street.

Jesse Vicary rose hastily from his chair and pushed back a pile of books, with a bright smile on his face, as he accepted the proffered hand.

"This is kind of you, Mr. Fenner, very kind, to come all this way to see me. Will you sit down? I can provide a chair, though usually they are full of books."

Hoel had not intended to sit down. He had meant to say that he was looking in for a minute; but once again he was impressed by the mysterious power which Jesse exercised over those who came in contact with him. Hoel wondered why this man, who had come from the lowest rung of the ladder, should be so devoid of false shyness. Thinking to discover this riddle he accepted the chair.

"Don't turn out any books for me," said Hoel. "We of the Grub Street brotherhood feel as if we were on a desert island if we see no books."

Hoel tried not to be condescending; but he was conscious that he was trying, while his companion had the advantage over him of being perfectly natural.

"You wished for some extra work, you told me, Mr. Vicary, and it so happens that we want Doctor's lecture—which comes off next Thursday evening at the Institute—reported rather more carefully than the newspaper reporter is accustomed to do it. I thought you might try your hand at it."

"It is very good of you to remember me. Thank you;

I shall be delighted. I have improved lately, as a friend of mine lets me help him at the House occasionally; but I dare not do too much night work. This I can well manage. I am most grateful."

"Don't say anything about that; and, by the way" (always doubt a fact being unimportant when so prefaced), "don't credit me with a better memory than I possess, for I ought to tell you that I have lately been meeting some friends of yours."

"Of mine?" said Vicary, quickly. "I have so few in London."

"No, not in London, but at Rushbrook."

Jesse's bright smile was a pleasure to see; he admired Mr. Fenner, and this connecting link seemed to make him all at once his friend, if he might use such an expression even to himself about one so much above him.

"Then you saw Mr. Kestell and the young ladies. Did they mention my sister?"

"Yes, Miss Kestell, the eldest one, talked about her."

Vicary, who had been standing up, stooped down a moment to arrange some books; then, half sitting on a low book-case, he said:

"You understand now, sir, why I want extra work. I have but one relation in the world, and I want to make a home for my sister Symee. I don't think it any shame for a woman to earn her bread in service; but it is hard upon any woman never to have known a home, nor parents, and to have no one to speak a familiar word to her. Symee has been all her life at Rushbrook; at least, when a child, she was at the farm-house close by, and I was away at school. Then, when she was thirteen, Mr. Kestell took her into his house. He has been very good to her, to both of us; we can never repay him; but, all the same, it will be the happiest day of my life when I can say: 'Symee, come home!' It does a man good to have such an object before him to urge him on; to have some one he loves above himself. Don't you think so, sir?"

It was a curious question to put to Hoel Fenner, because he was at present perfectly happy without this object. The self-denial which springs from love was to him an unknown force. It was only since he had seen Elva that the very faintest glimmer of light from that other world had pierced through his own peaceful atmosphere; but so faint was this

glimmer that, being on the whole no hypocrite, he said frankly:

"I have never had even a sister to work for, and I think I have been able to content myself."

Hoel's glance rested as he spoke on a good print of St. Christopher. He rose up and went to it, noting that Memling was the artist, and that Strixner was the engraver.

"This is a good print. Does it belong to you, or to the house?"

"That is mine. My sister had it given to her by Miss Amice Kestell, and asked leave to hand it over to me. Symee knew I should like it, but not how much it would help me. That big strong giant, finding the burden of the infant Christ almost more than he can do with, is a grand thought; and one sees he means to keep on till he has got to the other side. Then, though the rocks look cruel, there is the sun behind him, though he does not see it. I wonder sometimes why it is that we do not teach more with pictures. It is fortunate the Bible words are so plain, however, so that even our poorest, when they hear them, can make a picture for themselves in their own minds."

Jesse spoke quite naturally, as if he were merely speaking his thoughts out and expecting a sympathetic answer, so that Hoel was ashamed to show how little this kind of conversation was in his line.

"I doubt whether art would impress the masses very much, though that's rather the jargon of the time. Still, I believe that the clergy have in that direction a good deal increased their—what shall I call them?—stage properties."

Hoel could not mistake the expression of the intense feeling of disappointment in Vicary's face; he felt angry at having made a mistake; it would have been better simply to acquiesce. Before Hoel could retrieve his error, 'Liza's knuckles and shrill tones were both audible.

"If 'please, Mr. Vicary, there's a gentleman as wants to see you particular."

The gentleman evidently had not studied the rules of etiquette, for he followed 'Liza too closely to give Jesse a chance of asking Mr. Fenner's leave. Hoel rose; but as the new-comer blocked up the door-way, and as he, Hoel, did not wish to leave Vicary with a bad impression of him,

and was also curious about Vicary's friends, he remained where he was.

The new-comer was a tall, gaunt man, with deep-set eyes, very shabby garments, and long, thin hands. He brought with him into the room a reeking odor of stale tobacco and recent spirits, which Hoel thought most objectionable; but in spite of this the stranger interested him, or rather the unusual scene in which he was participating.

Jesse was as friendly and natural with this new visitor as he had been with the refined, literary Hoel; he brought a chair forward for the new-comer, who seemed almost too tall to be left standing.

"Mr. Fenner, this is my friend, Obed Diggings; he lived for some years at Greystone, and that seems to make us quite old friends. Now we are both obliged to live in London."

Hoel bowed graciously; he was getting over the smell of tobacco, and the surroundings were impressing themselves on his mental retina.

Obed Diggings turned toward Hoel and looked him over with a keen, piercing glance. It was not a glance of surprise, but of scrutiny: then apparently accepting him as Jesse's friend, and therefore his equal, he said:

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, sir." Obed sat down, and leaned his long, thin arms on a pile of books. "I hope, sir, I'm not disturbing you and our friend Vicary. He sees me pretty often; eh, Jesse, my lad? But though I'm double his age, I don't mind owning to you, sir, that I come here for help. There's many besides me who does that, and they don't go away empty; there's always something here to fill the cask."

"Come, Mr. Diggings," laughed Jesse, "you forget we're not alone. Mr. Fenner won't be taken in by your fine words; he knows I'm only a clerk, and not a millionaire. All the help I can give you is contained in a nutshell. You see, sir, I'm a good listener, and Mr. Diggings is full of ideas."

Mr. Diggings did not join in the laugh, but he gravely tapped his forehead.

"Yes, there's a heap of ideas here; they come, and go, and tread on each other's heels, but in bad times they get starved, and cry out for food."

As he spoke, the strange visitor took from an outside pocket a bundle tied up in a red pocket-handkerchief.

"I've brought it for you to see, Jesse; you've got such a good, clear head, that I like you to give a word to my things. This time, however, I think it's perfect; the world will soon know the name of Obed Diggings. Look here, Jesse, and you, sir, too, please. Can anything be more neat and handy than this? Why, we sha'n't be able to make them fast enough. I think I shall take Louis into partnership, or pay him by piece-work."

Hoel Fenner could not repress a smile of amusement as he approached the table, and saw Obed undoing the knots of the handkerchief with feverish energy, and taking out with great care a wooden photograph frame made in the shape of a heart, with a support behind to make it to stand on a table.

Jesse, too, had a smile on his face as he silently stood by and said:

"That is the same you brought me before."

"Yes, my lad, it is: but I've perfected this invention. There's no mistaking it now—it's original work. You see the heart, and the photograph to go inside. It may be that of your sweetheart; and if so, what more appropriate than that she should be in your heart! The idea will take like wildfire; but though this is ingenious, that's not the whole of my invention. Wait a minute."

Obed began fumbling again in his large pocket, while Jesse took up the frame and turned it round, to examine it, as he said to Hoel:

"Mr. Diggings wants to take out a patent for this, and I've been trying to dissuade him from doing it; but I'm not knowing about this sort of handiwork."

"Yes, that's it," continued Obed. "You're a kind fellow; but you don't quite understand. Now look here, this is the gem of the whole." He now produced a penny button-hole glass, to which he had attached a long wire. "This will make me a name. By this wire I shall fasten this glass, and then the whole will be first-rate: a heart for affection, a flower for remembrance. You see, Jesse, my lad, that the flower may be forget-me-not, or pansy, or what not. This patent will soon be in every shop-window; it will make our fortune—Milly's and mine."

"I'm afraid, as you've fixed it now, it will be a little

top-heavy," said Jesse, kneeling down and adjusting the glass. "Suppose we try putting it in the middle, there will be less chance of a misfortune to the patent—so; but wait a minute, the best plan will be for me to come and see you to-morrow after office work, and Milly and I can have a fixing-up consultation."

Obed Diggings took kindly to this suggestion, for evidently the unsympathetic attitude of the strange gentleman disturbed the flow of his ideas.

"Ah, we, yes; that would be best. I dare say you're busy to-night, Jesse. Thank you. I'll bring my specimen again. When we are rich, I'll not forget all you've done; no more will Milly."

Jesse assisted at the packing up, talking of ordinary matters to stop the flow of Obed's gratitude. Then, at last, with a bow, which was represented by a violent dip from his waist, Obed took his final leave.

Jesse watched him down the stairs, and when he returned to Mr. Fenner he had evidently forgotten his remark about the clergy, for his bright, eager look returned.

"You must forgive the old fellow, sir. He has seen better days, and he is not badly educated; besides, he's got a kind heart. You should see how tender he is to his poor crippled girl; but unfortunately he's got a terrible craze about inventions, instead of keeping to steady work. He learned cabinet-making, and does still earn money in the trade; but what he earns one day he throws away the next on his ideas, and, sometimes, I'm afraid he takes to drink a little. It's best to humor him, it keeps him straighter. People live queer lives round here; but there's much kindness, and some hard heads in spite of poverty. The worst is, the men get hold of bad books, and they meet in some of their clubs and like to hear the sound of their own voices."

Hoel listened, and seemed suddenly to have plunged into an unknown depth of sea, the soundings of which he had never before taken. Even now the horrible odor of stale tobacco, left as a legacy by Obed, made him thankful that his present surroundings would not last long.

"But you, Vicary, you have read a good deal; you are —excuse me for saying it—a good deal above your neighbors. If I were in your place, I think I should lodge in more—well, a more congenial place."

Again Hoel felt that he was trying to avoid patronizing his new acquaintance, and yet, how was he to help feeling superior to a man who had been saved from the work-house by the charity of a gentleman?

"I like the place," answered Jesse, thoughtfully. "You see, even here, I have two fellow-creatures to whom I can speak of Rushbrook and Greystone; 'Liza, the girl, comes from off Mr. Eagle Bennison's estate, and Obed remembers climbing the great moors, which we call the Forest of Alden down there. I was down at the Home Farm, as a lad, and many a happy scramble I've had up to the five clumps. If I shut my eyes, I can see it all again, though I don't often talk about it; it brings on the *mal du pays*, as the Swiss people say. I can't call it homesickness, never having had a home; but the longing for those downs seems almost worse. As to Golden Sparrow Street, it's not as bad as it looks to you, and, till Symee comes and lives with me, I prefer staying where I've got friends."

Hoel felt he must go now; so, after a few words more about the required work, he shook hands and walked quickly away. On his way home he experienced a feeling very unusual to him—that of having failed to make the right impression on his hearer. Usually, he knew he said and did exactly the right thing; but this was in society. Certainly, Jesse Vicary could not be said to come under that head, and Hoel was conscious of not having been in harmony with him, and yet, in spite of everything, he was still attracted.

"It's a pity, however, he has not escaped the religious cant of the middle class. I suppose there is something soothing in feeling better than one's neighbors, or talking more about it; we cultivated people have the same feelings, I dare say, but cover it up with a substantial overcoat; still, if he has the cant, he has it in its least objectionable form, for he is quite natural with it. Strange that Kestell of Greystone should have made himself responsible for twins. When I next go and see the Heatons I must ask Miss Kestell whether the Vicarys were quite common people; I have heard of Nature's gentleman, but never met it before. But by the time I do go to Rushbrook again, I shall have forgotten all about the subject. Besides, why should I go? If I do, I shall most likely not see her. Kestell never asked me to call. I should imagine he

only patronizes men with titles or fortunes; I've got neither, and should not be acceptable. Good heavens! what an idea. As if I wished to become acceptable!"

Hoel was fond of a certain kind of psychological studies, and smiled as he noted his own inconsistency; but when one has gone far enough in "the advancement of learning" one's self, it is interesting, but by no means exhilarating, to note the waywardness of one's own moral nature, and to find that knowledge does not necessarily guide actions.

Hoel said to himself that evening, when once again seated in his sanctum: "I will wash my hands of them all. When Vicary has finished this job, I shall have done my duty by him, and the connection will naturally come to an end. He is original and clever; but, after all, he can never rise above a certain level. A genius comes but seldom in a century; and, somehow, a London clerkship soon smothers even originality. It's a happy providence, so as to keep them well chained to their desks. No, I was rather rash in going to see him; I shall be more careful in the future."

But Hoel Fenner was somewhat too positive that evening, that he would not yield to circumstances; circumstance plays so large a part in all our lives, that it is better to acknowledge at once that we have to take it into consideration with all our reckonings of the future. Otherwise, when we strike against it, we may cannon off into a direction the very opposite to the one intended.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. KESTELL'S PENSIONER.

No one but Jesse Vicary knew what Jesse Vicary did in his spare moments. There was no one in his lodgings who cared to know except 'Liza, and she kept a mental almanac of his comings and goings. She did not care what he did outside; but she liked to hear his "Thank you, 'Liza," or to receive his nod and smile. Jesse himself did not chronicle his own doings, as some self-conscious folk are apt to do. Not that his mind was incapable of reflection; on the contrary, his thoughts were his companions; but there was nothing of the sentimentalist about him.

He looked around him and saw life as it was. He made no illusions about it, having the clear, healthy instincts of a man whose moral nature has not been willfully debased or kept in a religious hot-house. He saw squalid poverty; he saw physical waste and moral degradation. At times he would come in depressed from some friendly visit to a neighbor, whose moral reform seemed hopeless; but then Jesse would lay hold again more strongly of the great truths of Christianity, and, on his knees—for he was not ashamed to pray, but knew that prayer was his only safeguard—he would once more call out in his heart that God was more powerful than evil, for, somehow, he feared to dim this belief by contact with darkness.

Overcultivation often prevents fructification, and the school that Jesse Vicary had been brought up in had certainly not fostered sentiment. He could look back at his life at the grammar-school and remember with mingled shame and pleasure hard fights of no mean order between himself and his school-fellows, and a certain amount of insubordination to his teachers, tempered by fear of what Mr. Kestell would say if he heard of it, and whether he would take him away from his only chance of raising himself and of getting knowledge. Though not more industrious than his school-fellows, Jesse even then craved for knowledge.

But thrown in a small world which is a mimic of the big world and its attendant good and evil, Jesse could honestly look back and say that he had never soiled his conscience with deeds that would shun the light of day. He took no credit to himself for this; but it so happened that for a short time the boy had been brought under the influence of a man whose deep religious bearings had caused him to be accused of slight derangement in his cerebral mechanism.

A deep affection, such as will often be found between a pupil and his teacher, sprung up between these two, and Jesse never forgot the effect of that intercourse. It was like the opening of a new world to him; like the sound of rushing water in a desert; like the cool draught to a parched tongue.

Jesse had never talked of Richard Melton to any one, not even to Symee. The remembrance of that one year of friendship was something too holy to mention, as was also

the grief when the poor teacher, whose genius in book-learning was indisputable, was sent away because the head-master of the grammar-school found that the queer fellow was gaining too great an influence over the boys.

Richard Melton's work, however, was accomplished as far as concerned the poor, almost friendless, Jesse Vicary. The world of spiritual power which he had seen with his own eyes, exampled by the wholly self-denying life of the despised school-master, could never again be shut out from this pupil.

Looking back on that year, Jesse had come to the conclusion that Richard Melton must have experienced a great sorrow or had a great wrong done to him in his life. And yet he had never mentioned it to his boy friend; only he had painted to him the picture of injury heroically borne, so as to bring not crushing misery to the sufferer, but great nobility of soul. "If only he were alive now," often thought Jesse in his little den, "he would come here, and would tell me wonderful things, and make some of the mysteries around me as clear as he did then. If only I had been older, and could have understood him better!" But, alas! Richard Melton had been run over by a train shortly after his dismissal, in an attempt to clear the line of an obstruction put there by some evil-minded person or persons unknown. "Another proof of his craziness," the head-master said, for the train went over the obstruction and also over the body of Richard Melton without going off the line. Jesse could still remember the boyish grief he had suffered when he heard the news; how he would wake up night after night, seized with the horrible night-mare that he was trying to save Mr. Melton and was too late, and he would find himself in an agony of fear at having seen, with terrible distinctness, the two fiery eyes of the oncoming train close upon him, which vision, curiously enough, occasionally took the appearance of Mr. Kestell's benign countenance.

That phase had gone by long ago; the lapse of time had softened the personal grief; but Jesse had the strength of noble natures, the strength to remember, which fact has not been enough considered by our philosophers and moralists. Even now at times, Vicary, strong, broad-shouldered man that he was, had a nervous, womanish dread of a train. Symee had found this out, and gently laughed at

him, or scolded him for saying most likely it was a presentiment of the manner of his death. In truth, it was the strong effect of those terrible nightmares.

But besides arousing the power of spiritual outlook, it was this same Richard Melton who had implanted in the boy of no particular prospects that deep, intelligent love of books which had been Jesse's blessing, and also somewhat of a curse. It made him chafe against the dry routine of his clerk's work at the merchant's office. Card & Lilley were highly respectable coal merchants; but Vicary's work was as uninteresting as it is possible to imagine. He knew he could never rise higher, nor could his salary. On the other hand, if he continued to give satisfaction, there was no likelihood of his being turned off. But Vicary had had, very conservative persons would perhaps think unfortunately, the passion of learning implanted by the so-called crazy usher. He had taught him to make an intelligent use of the little Latin the grammar-school gave freely, if uninterestingly. He had shown him the beauty of some of the classic authors, and eagerly pointed out far more than the boy could then take in, but which came back to him at intervals like the remembrance of dreams.

Vicary's mind became from thenceforth an insatiable devourer of all literary knowledge. He had, moreover, a marvelous memory, which seemed able to grapple with the difficulty of storing knowledge away till wanted. He wanted knowledge, and yet knowledge seemed of little use to him, for Mr. Kestell had procured him the post of office-boy at Card & Lilley's without consulting him; and here in London he had been ever since, rising from sweeping out the office to adding up tons of coals, and balancing profit and loss.

But London offers great advantages to book-lovers; the free libraries and the cheap book shops soon knew Vicary's figure; the devouring of books proceeded side by side with profit and loss, and side by side with the growth of his spiritual nature.

Jesse had, however, now no thought of change. He was not enterprising for himself as far as money was concerned; still, he was glad of any extra work, not only for Symee's sake, but also because the work might perhaps lie in a direction more pleasing to him than tons of coal. It

was this that had made him feel Hoel Fenner's kindness. After all these dreary years a new hope had entered his soul, and he thanked Heaven for it. Only those who have been longing for intellectual sympathy or exchange of thought can understand the feeling of Jesse; but not being used to good times, he was half afraid of his own joy. Symee's words came back to him. Was he ambitious? No. Or it was only a proper ambition such as Mr. Melton would have sanctioned. Outwardly, he was contented; he had health, strength, an honest name, if poor, and a love of learning.

Such was Jesse Vicary after Hoel Fenner's visit; he felt that he had passed a new threshold, and hope seemed then a glorious figure leaning on the anchor which was all-powerful to support her.

The next day the new horizon made everything appear bathed in sunshine. Jesse felt an unusual spirit of reform take possession of him. Nothing looked impossible; he even began forming a plan about the possibility of telling 'Liza how much better she would look without smuts on her face, but thinking better of this, he decided he would put off this delicate mission till Symee should come to live with him. He took up a German book before going out, and found that the sense became clear to him. Everything seemed suddenly to have made a bound in a new direction; everything looked plain. He even entertained the idea of making Obed Diggings give up invention and stick to his cabinet-making; he would go, he thought, that very evening to him about it. So, coming home from the office, he purchased a bunch of flowers for Milly, and when his modest meal was finished, he sallied forth through the dingy streets.

Obed Diggings' lodgings were at the end of Golden Sparrow Street, over a small tobacconist shop, and the little front room where Milly lay all day on a couch near the window, was also the dwelling-room of the cabinet-maker, who had gone down in the world because of his too fertile imagination and his occasional inordinate thirst. But, in his way, Obed was a good father; his golden dreams of future fabulous fortunes always included poor Milly, who, having been allowed to tumble down-stairs before her bones were sufficiently hardened by use, had sustained an injury to her spine, which made her a very useless member

of the Golden Sparrow community. Her mind had grown, however, if her body had never been strong. She had been able to get about just a little when they lived at Greystone; but London air and the constant pressure of her father's erratic ways had taken away the little strength she had retained. How she hated London! But now they seemed settled there till death. Obed had heard of good work near Golden Sparrow Street, and in one of his moments of hope had left Greystone, and all his friends and relations, and had dragged his only child to her present quarters.

But Milly did not complain, she only longed.

When Jesse's knock was heard at the door, Milly's pale cheeks flushed. Down at Greystone she could never have seen him, so she said that partly made up for town life.

Her father was loudly talking and gesticulating to an acquaintance this evening. Each one fancied himself the genius and his companion the fool; so no wonder it sounded as if they were having words, while, in fact, each was trying to make the other see that he had better own that his rampart was indefensible; but this, as we know, is the last thing to be expected of our adversary.

Jesse Vicary's entrance happily stopped the discussion for a little. Milly heaved a little sigh of relief, though without stopping her delicate wool crochet, a labor she sold to the West End shops for ridiculous prices, this work being now as little profitable as the wool which originally ornamented the back of the sheep.

Obed jumped up to welcome his visitor. He was very hospitable, and would smoke and drink his last penny with a friend. Fortunately for him, from motives of economy, Jesse did neither.

"That's right now, Jesse, my lad. Glad to see you. You'll come and settle between us. Here's Mr. Joe Button says that a man who has not been a miner can never make any inventions for mines that will hold water. Now I say that he's wrong, quite wrong. We want to get the water out of the mines!" Obed brought his fist down on the table and made the glasses rattle. "Why, don't you remember that lantern of mine, Jesse, which I worked at last year? If I had finished it, why, you'd never have heard of another explosion in those rascally mines, and yet I've never been down, nor never mean to go down, a

mine. It's the brain that's wanted, not the blacking of one's clothes, as you seem to think, Mr. Button."

Jesse, smiling, cast a look at Mr. Button, and decided that he, too, belonged to the class that had been better off. Golden Sparrow Street was full of such people, and some of the men had as keen and clever intellects as you could wish to find when—yes, when the demon left them alone.

Mr. Joe Button's face spoke of mental capacity; but spoke also of drink. The oppressed look in his eyes, the shaking hands, the sudden flashes of wit, and the as sudden dull moments, when it seemed doubtful whether he took in all that was said, marked him out as a man already far advanced on the downward path which leads to hell upon earth. Mr. Button spoke good English, was better educated than Obed Diggings, though certainly less inventive; but he had none of that child-like confidence and openness of purpose which attracted one to the cabinet-maker in spite of his conceit, or, shall we call it, belief in himself.

"It's not any use a man what has never been in the bosom of a mine saying he can undersatnd what is wanted," said Mr. Button, addressing Jesse, as more likely to be sane on the subject of safety-lamps. "I was overseer for ten years, up in the north, to a man that understood more than most land folk; and yet even he made mistakes at times."

"That was a good berth, I should think," said Jesse, cheerfully, as he crossed the room to give Milly the flowers he had bought for her. "Have you left it, sir, or are you only on a visit to Golden Sparrow Street?"

"Call it the Estate, Jesse, my lad; call it Golden Sparrow Estate. All the street belongs to one of your close-fisted money-getting villains," put in Obed, hotly, "who sends round his ugly-faced collector for the rents as if money was the sole object of man! You know the fellow we call Baggy Bob, eh, Jesse? Last time he called I was busy with that frame you saw, and didn't want to be bothered about rent. Well, he was as impertinent as—"

"Never mind all about that, father," put in Milly. "Can't you give Mr. Vicary a chair? Just look at these flowers he's given me."

Mr. Joe Button eyed the young clerk with his dull eyes as if he were trying to place him in a catalogue he kept for

all the human beings he met, and the look, besides being dull and heavy, was also envious. Joe Button remembered himself when he too was capable of becoming an honored and respected member of society; but he, like many of us, had failed on the way, and, while he blamed others for the failures, in his own heart he was honest enough to know he had only to blame himself.

Obed never blamed himself or others, having a happy unconsciousness of failure; but, to make up for this self-deceit, Obed never envied the embodiment of his might have beens.

"I don't see," answered Mr. Button, still eying Jesse, "I don't see that a rent collector has to be blamed for doing his duty. That's what England expects of us all. Indeed, I'm thinking of going into the collecting business myself. I've thought of tax collecting; but it doesn't seem to be varied enough. I'd prefer the private business; I never did like being mixed up with the government."

Mr. Button did not mention that the reason of his being disinclined to serve her majesty was that his testimonials were much too vaguely worded to be of much use for a public life.

"I must say," replied Jesse, feeling he must make a remark, though he would have preferred Mr. Button's room to his company, "I should not like to be a collector of money. In the first place, I should not like to do my duty in getting it out of people who were unwilling to give it to me; and then—well, I don't know," he added, laughingly, "if I were very hard up I don't know whether the sight of gold that wasn't mine would give me much pleasure."

"And during those ten years," continued Obed, still running on his own genius, "did you ever try to improve the safety-lamp, Mr. Button? I'm sure I'd have taken out several patents. You see the ideas are all so numerous in my mind that out they will come, like flour from a sack that's too full. It's wonderful!"

Mr. Button took his glass of beer and fixed his eye on Obed as he swallowed it down, as much as to say: "That man's a wonderful fool." He only answered him when he put down the glass.

"No, I didn't. I was busy in a better way, and my chief was particular, though kind enough. I've nothing

to say against him as a master. It's what he left undone that I found fault with more, not what he did."

"And what was that?" said Obed. "Wouldn't try your new steam-valve, or something like that? I find men are as suspicious as rats with poison; they won't try it; which aggravates the feelings of those as lay the poison about."

"It was nothing of that sort," said Mr. Button, contemptuously, filling his glass again—"nothing. I'm sure the master wouldn't have stood inventions. He was always saying, 'Be cautious, Button; there must be no explosions here, remember; I should never forgive myself if the men suffered.' No, he was tender-hearted—too tender-hearted. I don't hold by soft hearts in a man's bosom; that's for the ladies. He was not mean, either; but, after all my long, faithful service, he refused me a character such as I thought necessary for my future. He owes me a character, that's what Mr. Kestell does."

Jesse was struck by the name, and also he could not refrain a smile, which he hid by turning away, before he said:

"Mr. Kestell! That's not a common name. Was he the owner of the mine?"

Obed and his daughter knew nothing of Mr. Button's character, but they knew well the name of Kestell, so both looked interested.

"He was the owner of the land first, and of the mine afterward. It was one of those lucky hits which don't come often. He must have bought the land cheap. It went through two or three hands before; I don't remember the names of them. I was a native of the place, so I ought to know about it from the beginning. But, gracious me, I never thought what that bit of land was worth, or I would have kept it myself. In those days my father and I were big fools. I don't know anything that turns one's stomach more than seeing a man walk into something of uncommon value without any trouble. Lord! what sums he's made from that mine. Of course now it's not so good as it was; trade's gone to the dogs. But Mr. Kestell ought not to complain."

"How long is it since you left off that work?" said Obed Diggings, eying his friend.

"A year or two—yes, two. And, as I said before, I don't complain of what Mr. Kestell did. He recognized

my value, for he gave me a pension; but he wouldn't put enough down in writing. A pension is no use to a man whose energy is not gone; you see, he prefers work."

"Perhaps it's your Mr. Kestell," said Obed; and Jesse noted at once, nor indeed was he surprised at noting, the suspicious gleam in Mr. Joe Button's face.

"It's Kestell of Greystone they call him. If it's yours or not, I'm not complaining of him, except that he was too soft; a chicken heart is good to make chicken-broth for invalids, it's not much good for men."

Soon after this speech, however, Mr. Button took his departure, and Jesse was not sorry.

"It seems to me that Mr. Kestell has pensioned a rogue," said Obed, who could not forgive his visitor's scornful remarks about his inventions. "He came to me about some business, and was recommended to me by people who knew I was clever in most lines. But I think I could patent that rogue, Jesse, my lad, and no one would wish to steal him from me."

"You've often said how kind Mr. Kestell was, Mr. Vicary," said Milly, glad to be again a recognized unit in the room; "and that is a proof of it; he couldn't guess you would ever meet this Mr. Button, could he?"

"That he couldn't! I expect that his overseer became too fond of the bottle, so, instead of a false character, he gave him a pension. You see, he wouldn't be unjust to another employer, and yet wouldn't let the man starve. I did once hear he had made money by some mining property; but I never knew any particulars. One never hears Mr. Kestell talk of his good deeds."

"I expect you've done more for yourself than ever Mr. Kestell did for you?" said Obed. "It's wonderful the difference there is in human stuffs; some will turn into good patents, and some are quite worthless inventions."

"Not worthless," said Jesse, "don't say that, Mr. Diggings. If I were to think so, it would take away so much of the joy of living; and just now everything seems to be bright. No, no, not worthless; I don't believe God ever loved a worthless world."

Obed shook his head; his religion dated back a long way, and stopped soon after.

"I'm not going to bring out a theological patent as you could do, Jesse—no, but I go about a good deal, and see

much more worthless than good stuff. But just talk a bit to Milly, and I'll fetch the frame. Why, it's vastly improved since you saw it. You'll see it is."

When Obed was gone to his own work-shop, Jesse seemed to throw off a momentary sadness that had come over him. Milly was still occasionally smelling her flowers. She was so grateful to Jesse for his thought of her, and yet did not know how to express her gratitude.

"It makes me think of the country," she said, looking up at him, "and of the things you tell me of Rushbrook. You know I never got further than the village but once, when our rector's wife drove me to the farm at Rushbrook; but it's like a dream to me now. I remember nothing but the water. Sometimes, when it's very hot here, I think of that beautiful water till it gets almost cool."

"I wish I had your power of making wishes come true," said Jesse, smiling.

"But not all of them. When father talks as he did just now, I want to say something, and I get angry. There's a meeting to-night at the Golden Sparrow, and Tom Novis is going to talk."

Tom Novis was a man who lectured on religion or non-religion. He also came round with infidel tracts, and, among his friends, was considered a smart fellow, and one who knew something. Jesse also knew him slightly.

"I dare say he means to do good," said Jesse, thoughtfully. "He couldn't take so much trouble to do harm. But he hasn't really gone into things; one soon comes to the end of his knowledge. I expect, Milly, he's not yet felt the want of something above himself; but there are many who might know more, and yet do the same thing."

"It's all I have," said the girl, in a low voice. "I think God has wanted me to lie here because He sees it's good for me; and if they took that from me what would they leave me? That and your visits," she added, more cheerfully, "and the books you lend me, though I can't understand them all."

"I'm afraid I don't choose them properly for you; but I'm getting to know your tastes better."

In truth, Jesse was very ignorant about the opposite sex, as most men with a few exceptions are, even those who pride themselves on their knowledge.

"But, Milly, I have a piece of good news, which I have

kept for you, because you will be glad. I said to myself you shall be the first to hear it."

The bright blush told of Milly's pleasure, but she guessed it only too easily.

"They've given you a holiday?"

"Yes; I was to have it in December, but the other clerk has offered to change; it's more convenient to him; and I'm to have my ten days in a week's time. Only think of that, Milly, in this glorious weather. Fancy striding up to Crow's Nest, and roaming about the pools, and climbing the Beacon, and going miles and miles over the forest."

"I am glad," said Milly, so unselfish that she would not even say how much she would miss him. "I wonder if, some day, I shall be able to walk there, too. But when you talk I can see it all."

"And there's something else, Milly. I've got a new friend, and he has brought me some work, work after my own heart."

"That's Mr. Fenner you told me about."

"Yes, and he came himself to pay me a visit; and, what is nicer, he had just been to Rushbrook, and talked about it."

"And you'll lodge at the farm, and see your sister often?"

"Yes, as often as Mrs. Kestell will let her out. She's a dreadfully exacting person; but then Symee never complains, because of Mr. Kestell's kindness. You see the sort of man he is from that Mr. Button's story."

"You deserve all your pleasure," she said, from her heart; "you're always doing something for other people."

"Nonsense! Why, you would do the same for your friends, and aren't you one of my friends?"

Milly shook her head.

"You're ever so different somehow."

"A working-man, that's all—not an inventor," added Jesse, smiling, as Obed Diggings came back, carrying his last effort of genius with great pride and care in his hands.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE'S PITFALLS.

Elva passionately loved her home and the moorlands about it; the charm of varying lights and shadows ap-

pealed, without her knowing it, to that which was awakening in her now that she had reached the happy stage in life when control was no longer exercised over her doings. She was like a newly freed bird that flutters hither and thither, before it thinks of alighting on a twig, so that it may fully realize its liberty. Amice was free to do all the good works she liked. She could visit the poor, and teach in the schools. But Elva rejected all these restraints, in spite of Mr. Heaton's suggestions and Miss Heaton's plain words that, "It was a great mistake when girls thought of nothing better than pleasing themselves when they came out."

"I hate poor people," was Elva's answer. "I do them no good; I don't know what to say to them. I would give them all the money I have rather than be expected to visit them. I get more good by sitting on the moor for an hour, looking at the lovely things there, than by going into poky cottages."

Miss Heaton, who thought visiting the poor was the highest ambition and the highest work of woman, often shook her head over Elva Kestell's sins, and she would talk to her brother about them, little guessing that though he always said, "Yes, Clara," and "Exactly so, Clara," in his heart he admired the willful strength of Miss Kestell's determination not to be molded into another Clara Heaton! Oh, those dreadful, deceiving beings called bachelor brothers! What do they not deserve? How bold they are to deceive their spinster sisters, and how cowardly, too, in the way they slink out of their stronghold when it is indefensible. Clara Heaton kept strict guard over her brother, being resolved that as he had not married before she came to keep house for him, he should not do so afterward! He had passed the stage of fervor which had once made him think that a celibate body of clergy would be the highest blessing to England; now he was painfully conscious that Clara often reminded him indirectly of his past utterances, and he saw that she meant to keep him to his word.

Happily for Clara Heaton, Rushbrook Mills boasted of but few ladies. The lovely church in its wood of fir-trees, with its glorious outlook over vast expanses, was wife enough for any clergyman, thought the maiden sister; if Herbert did his duty to his church and his parish, that was

enough object to last a man's life-time. In her narrow way Miss Heaton was very determined; and, good and high-minded as he was, Herbert was a coward the moment his sister's neat bonnet, plain jacket, and unfashionable but useful skirts came within sight.

Miss Heaton had long ago reckoned up her enemies, and seen, or tried to see, where the greatest danger lay. There was the Honorable Betta up on the Beacon—no, there could be no danger from her—plain, shy, awkward, often required at home, and never saying much that was audible. There were one or two other young ladies who were living with aunts, or uncles, or widowed mothers. These were always in a state of adoring the vicar, and were useful for church decorations, and for making up a week-day congregation. To these, Miss Heaton was kind and patronizing, encouraging them just enough to keep them up to the pitch of doing useful work, but knowing exactly where to stop, for fear lest their open admiration of Herbert should lead to anything in the least unsuitable, such as working slippers for him, or offering to make him a surplice. They might go as far as book-markers for the church, and surplices for the choir boys; further, they must not go. But, as a matter of fact, Herbert, good, innocent man that he was, never guessed even that book-markers meant more than helps to find places; and that choir boys' surplices hid hopeless love; he would have been truly shocked had he divined the joy of stitching for him.

Miss Heaton was now quite happy about these young ladies; but as she had heard often of the enormities committed by young vicars, she never ceased her watchfulness.

Then there were the "Kestell girls," as she called them, and stray visitors at Court Garden. She had not yet decided in her own mind which constituted her greatest point of danger, whether habitual sight, or sudden enchantment. It was this knotty question that kept her mind so frightfully busy. Would Herbert succumb to long knowledge engendering love, or would some pink and white beauty steal his heart? Neither of these terrible catastrophes must be allowed; but, oh! the watchfulness required, the planning, the little deceits, the small subterfuges.

She finally settled that she had most to fear from Amice Kestell. Amice was good; and, but for her intense want

of color, very pretty; only she looked more like some beautiful marble statue than real flesh and blood in the shape of a woman to fall in love with.

Still, Amice was constantly to be met with in cottages. She was loved by every man, woman, and child in Rushbrook Mills district, while Miss Heaton was feared. She was often, too, at church, though not with the regularity of the young ladies before mentioned. Rather, she came like some angel, who, ruled by unknown laws, appears at uncertain intervals. On Amice, then, Miss Heaton concentrated her watchfulness, because she felt sure that Elva, who never went to a cottage, who thought chiefly of the things of earth, would never in the least attract her saintly brother Herbert.

Alas! for the genius of the cleverest of us when it comes to fathoming the opposite sex. When Clara so often remarked against the doings or the non-doings of that wayward Elva Kestell, Herbert always mentally found excuses for the fair sinner. He prided himself on understanding her, and on seeing all the good beneath the beautiful exterior. We must, of course, at once grant that to a man's mind there is much more likely to be unfathomed and hidden good in the heart of a beautiful woman than in that of a very plain one. In fact, quite unknown to himself, Herbert, from a certain charitable fairness in his character, was always finding excuses for Elva, while Amice, who needed none, and was never mentioned by Clara, came in for a lesser share of his thoughts. Indeed, he had an undefined feeling of strangeness and creepiness in her presence which in no way could lead to love.

Elva Kestell was like a new piano from the best maker—it wanted to be played upon to make sure of its tone, and till time and use had done their work, it was impossible to tell how much extraordinary worth it possessed.

Her nature had nothing artificial about it as yet; and surrounded apparently by every gift of fortune—health, wealth, and happiness—it seemed probable that she would sail happily with her rich freight into a pleasant harbor.

Such, dimly, were her own thoughts this lovely autumn afternoon, as, having taken her sketching things to her favorite stile, she had tried to express many things with her one brush, and had failed to make a picture at all resembling what she saw.

The afternoon was closing in. On the upland meadows spread out before her the cows were feeding as if this day were their last, for the shadows were lengthening and milking-time was approaching. She had gazed at the distant forest land till she turned away impatiently, feeling that she could not take in the thoughts she dimly found there, and so looked toward the right, where she could catch line upon line of undulating country, penciled out in milky blues and invisible greens, while here and there pale-yellow patches showed where corn-fields or stubble-fields were announcing with their silent speech that man can not live on beauty alone, but requires food also; in other words, that the needs of man's body have equal power as well as his spiritual necessities.

Elva threw her paint-brush on the grass, and, hiding her face in her hands, listened. The wind was bearing her a message over the moors, and the wonderful voices of the trees which interpreted the wind, were plainly audible.

"Miss Kestell!"

She started up as if the call had been supernatural, as if she were bound to follow, as if the moment had come when her vision would become clear and her life full of expected promise. Up till now she had been, so it seemed to her, all failure. She had tried to write, and her efforts had covered her with secret shame. She had tried to find a voice in music, in drawing, in the deep love she bore to her father and her sister; but she was still unsatisfied, and now, in the pause she had made to listen, she had heard a message of greater fullness, of greater possibilities; and when the voice, for the first moment unrecognized, so low was it, had called her, she was prepared to follow. She rose up in all her beauty of coloring and young womanhood to find only—yes, only—Walter Akister beside her!

The revulsion of feeling was so great that she said not a word.

As to Walter Akister, now that he had made her get up and could see her in all the loveliness of her happy youthfulness, he became mute. He could not tell her that he had seen her from a long way off; that he had followed her stealthily, like a Norway hunter follows the track of the wild deer, and that for a moment he had stood by her side unperceived, and had felt that if only he could tell her all

he was experiencing, Elva, who had never shown him the least attention, must give in.

Good heavens! but how could she know? The moment she stood up and confronted him, Walter's fierce, brooding, bad-tempered nature reasserted itself strongly. He was again the shy, wayward man, whom neither men nor women ever thought of liking or making friends with. The irony of such natures is dreadful; the passion they have no power to express—and which it seems some evil demon turns to hatred almost as easily as to love—is often stronger than in more happy-minded beings. Happiness for such people is only a name; if given to them, the draught seems to turn to poison as it touches their lips; and this is no exaggerated language. Something—the riddle of which is too complicated to solve—ties them down, not only to their misery, but to the misery of others; and yet, let us say at once that Walter Akister, up till now, had been no man's enemy but his own. He seemed to be possessed of two natures, one full of passionate love and wish for enjoyment, and the other possessed of a strong determined force to frustrate the enjoyment of all pleasure and turn every cup of luscious wine into bitter vinegar.

For a few moments Walter had stood unseen by Elva, and had thought that if she would be his wife—let the probation be never so long—he would show her all that love and devotion could do for woman. He would teach her the depth of truest, noblest worship; but, suddenly, his other and stronger self asserted its presence. The evil cloud of doubt, of pride, of fancied wrongs, of perverse judgment, of obstinate imperviousness came down upon him, and he was dumb. As for Elva, when she had regained her power of speech, and with it a visible expression of impatience, she remarked:

"How you startled me, Mr. Akister! You might at least have—"

She did not know how to finish, and so sat down on the step at the foot of the stile, and began to collect her materials.

Her words were like so many daggers to poor Walter, as if in a vision you had been promised a sight of Heaven, and had, instead, been shown Dante's Inferno.

"I am very sorry," he stammered, leaning against the

stile. "I ought, perhaps, to have let you know I was coming; but—"

He made a plunge, this being the most unwise thing he could do, when Elva, as he must have known, guessed nothing of his intentions.

"But what? I dislike being startled. I'm going home now: the shadows have all altered."

"But, please, don't go this minute: I want to say something to you."

Still, Elva guessed nothing: how could she, seeing that Walter Akister's manner was as cold and as surly as usual? He seemed to command her, even though his words were ordinary: and Elva disliked commands in any form.

"Then you can walk my way," said Elva, "or as far as I go," she added, thinking what a loss it would be if her lovely walk should be spoiled by the presence of that stupid, surly Walter Akister. "I think I shall find Amice down by the church: the evening service must be over."

This matter-of-fact way of viewing his presence once more upset Walter's calculations, but he was driven to his ruin to-day by his evil genius.

"I came down to spend a few days at home on purpose to see you, so you might spare me a few minutes."

"To see me!" exclaimed Elva, in a tone of surprise, and just a little mollified—for what woman can resist, on being taken unawares, the charm of being specially singled out, even by the man she hates, or worse, by the one she despises?

"Yes, to see you. You never seem to guess how often I do come home for this reason. Do you fancy it is for my father, who hardly knows whether we are in the house or not? or for Betta, who—"

"What are you saying?" gasped Elva, feeling the color mounting to her cheeks, and looking at the long stretch of moorland before she could reach the valley. Then her eyes wandered toward the vicarage chimneys that peeped up above the firs. This was the nearest house, and she would go there.

"Don't you understand me?" he said, growing more surly, because more hopeless. "That ever since I've lived here I've loved you, and now that you are going into the world you ought to know it, because—there, I must say it

—it drives me mad to see you talking to other fellows. Look here, Elva, I've loved you always since I've known you, and always shall. I shall ask you again and again. You don't love any one else now, but you may meet some one who you may fancy loves you, and then—"

Elva was too much surprised and too angry to interrupt this speech sooner, now, however, she found breath to say, as she stood still and looked fearlessly at her strange lover:

"I don't know how you dare speak to me like this, Mr. Akister; I never knew you cared about me—I never even guessed it—and let me say, once for all, I shall never, never love you, and certainly I will never marry you. Pray let that end the subject. And now, please, let me go home alone."

Elva steadied her voice and looked like a queen commanding a subject; but inwardly she was frightened by the strange, terrible look on Mr. Akister's face. She felt inclined to cry, for her romantic ideas had received a great shock. She had fancied love coming in the form of all that was beautiful and lovely; but in this shape it seemed altogether dreadful. However, Elva was brave, and none of these feelings appeared on the surface.

Suddenly Walter Akister repented. He was angry with himself for having been so rude, so altogether different from his intentions. He could have knelt down at her feet at this moment and prayed for her forgiveness; he could have asked her to curse him if she could forgive him afterward. But all this flow of repentance remained in his thoughts, because of his shyness and of his pride.

However, he was subdued and penitent enough, even outwardly, for Elva to see it. She breathed again more freely, and her limbs trembled less.

"Forgive me," he said, in a low voice, in which Elva could hear the tone of terrible dejection. "Forgive me! I was mad just now. But you don't understand what I feel, and what I mean. Will you forget my horrible rudeness, and remember only the cause?"

Elva's feelings were easily touched. Much of her charm was in that varying mood of manner and of expression of thought. She held out her hand, though without moving, for she meant to get rid of her lover.

He seized it for a moment, and then dropped it.

"If you mean nothing but forgiveness, I would rather

not take it. Good-bye! You may forget all this, though I can not. Remember, I shall never change. That night of the dinner-party at the Eagle Bennisons I found out that I must tell you. I couldn't bear to see that London fellow near you. I hated him."

Then, abruptly turning away, Walter Akister took the upward path toward the Beacon.

Elva continued her walk home in a new frame of mind. She saw nothing more of the beauty around her. She only knew that she was strangely moved, and very angry with Walter Akister except for his last words. Hoel Fenner suddenly appeared to her, when contrasted with Walter Akister, like a beautiful *preux chevalier*. So clever, so courtly, so worthy of being admired. Strange that, in pleading his own cause, Walter had advanced that of the "London fellow." Half an hour later Elva tapped softly at her father's door.

CHAPTER VIII.

PROUD OF HER NAME.

It was the day Mr. Kestell came home early from Greystone. He often did so now, leaving much to his partner; but on Thursdays he was usually at Rushbrook by four o'clock. The first thing he always did on arriving was to go to his wife's sitting-room, which, as we have seen, was the most luxurious place in the house. By four o'clock Mrs. Kestell had got over the fatigue of getting up and eating her luncheon, and was at her best, looking forward to her afternoon tea, which was brought in when she made up her mind to ring for it. At this time Symee was in attendance, and reading to her mistress.

"The best was," as Mrs. Kestell often said, "that Symee, having been taught well, and having always lived with educated people, could read well, and never dropped her h's."

By this Mrs. Kestell meant it was best for herself, and not for Symee, because the invalid could not bear to hear an uneducated intonation; it jarred her nerves.

When Mr. Kestell entered, Symee always put a mark in her book, and left the room; and then might have been seen the most tender, lover-like behavior on the part of the old man, who, having married for love, had never,

even to himself, allowed how little pleasure he had derived from his marriage.

"Well, darling," he said to-day—and it was only a repetition, with variations, of many past days—"how do you feel now? Does this warm weather try you? What a glorious autumn we are having!"

The kiss he imprinted on his wife's still unwrinkled forehead was gentle and loving as a woman's; and the action of putting on her shawl, which had a habit of slipping off—sharing its owner's want of strength of purpose—was touching in its unobtrusive thoughtfulness.

But Mrs. Kestell was accustomed to all these attentions, and took no special notice of them.

"Well, yes, the weather is very trying, Josiah. I thought of taking a short drive after lunch, but I could not make up my mind about it, and now it will soon be too chilly."

"Wouldn't a little turn in the garden be good for you, if you took my arm?"

"Oh, dear, no! You would walk too fast. You don't half understand all I suffer; men never do. No, you had better not trouble yourself about me."

The injured tone came into her voice. One might have fancied her husband had asked her to go up the Matterhorn.

"Very well, dear; do just as you fancy. But really the air is delicious, and such a sky as there is this evening. I expect Elva is sketching. She seems to have taken to her drawing again lately. Your mother was a good artist. It would be odd if neither of the girls inherited it."

The mention of Lady Ovenden was, however, quite a mistake.

"Of course my mother had great advantages—the best masters and the best society—which my poor girls have never had. I believe it is that which makes Amice so quiet. She wants shaking up, and mixing with people—people of her own standing, I mean."

Mr. Kestell's face was troubled; there passed over his handsome, benign features a distinct look of pain.

"But what could we have done, dear? You know Elva never would go to school, or she could have been to the best; and Amice would not leave her sister, and then you

have never been strong enough to take them about, and I could not leave you."

There was no shade of annoyance in his voice—only one of deep concern.

"I know all that, Josiah; but still it does seem strange that we, who are so much better off than the Fitzwilliams, can not give our girls the advantages their cousins have."

"Shall we ask Mrs. Fitzwilliam to take the girls out next spring? I fancy that if we offered to pay for the house in town and all expenses she would certainly not refuse!"

"I dare say not. Ellen never does make her ends meet, I feel sure; but I know what she would do; she would make her girls take the foremost position, and she is quite capable of making Elva and Amice play the rôle of poor cousins! That would never do. The best chances would be all for her plain daughters."

Mr. Kestell smiled a wintery smile, however. Money seemed to be able to do so little for him and his own people.

"Still, I fancy, Elva, at all events, wouldn't let herself be treated as a poor cousin! My little girl would make her mark anywhere."

"So would Amice," put in Mrs. Kestell, in an injured voice; though she was willing to find fault with her youngest daughter herself, she was jealous for her. "With her voice she would be asked out everywhere."

"If she would sing."

"How very unfair you are to Amice. You know she is not always in a mood for singing."

"Yes, of course; I meant no harm, dear. Now, speak about yourself. Would you like to have another opinion?"

"Dear me, no; that last London man did no good at all; those great men are so conceited. They come down with preconceived notions, and never listen to one's symptoms."

"I thought he took such pains."

"Just because he asked such a high fee! That is like a man, really, Josiah; after all these years you might know better. Pray ring the bell for my tea. I suppose you will wait for the girls."

"No, dear; if you like I will have a cup of tea with you."

"Oh, no, I like to be read to as I eat; I digest better. If you ring, Symee or Amice will come."

Soon after, Mr. Kestell was slowly pacing his own room, plunged in deep thought, which, if judged by the weary look on his face, could have been nothing very inspiriting. Every now and then he murmured:

"I did my best for her, my very best. I said she should want for nothing. I could not give her health—everything else. Good heavens, everything else!"

It was out of this brown, perhaps black, study that he was aroused by a knock at his door.

His "Come in!" brought in Elva. Here, at all events, was the bright spot of his life; and his whole face brightened.

"Papa, are you busy?"

"Never too busy to see you, dear; and, in truth, just now I was doing nothing."

He went to his arm-chair and sat down by the fire, for, as his wife said, it was getting chilly, and the fire had just been lighted. The daylight was merged into a golden sky; the autumn afternoon was ending in exquisite beauty. Elva flung off her hat, and put down her sketching-bag as she approached her father. It did his heart good to see her perfect confidence in him; there was not the slightest fear of him expressed in her actions, only a certainty of finding sympathy, which seemed to make the blood flow more freely in his veins; for, if not imbittered by thoughts of the future, or the past, this mutual confidence between parent and child is one of the most divine feelings man can experience. He saw that Elva felt perfect trust in him, and that her great affection, which made her feel herself his equal, and also made her look up to him, was an absolute reality. He, too, was quick to catch the tones of her voice, and he added:

"What is it, darling? Something is the matter. Not another novel, is it? Never mind, there are ways and means of getting any book floated. Sinnel told me that when I had my secret interview with him."

"No, no, papa; it's not that. I shall never write another novel. I mean, never one I shall want you to pay for. I see money is really of no use in such cases. Per-

haps, after all, literature is the only real republican thing in the world! We must stand or fall by the judgment of one's fellow-creatures; but—"

Elva felt shy and stopped short.

"What is it? No, not—love?"

The idea came suddenly, and seemed to send a dagger through him. He could not spare his Elva to another—the one joy of his life which had not disappointed him. Then, suddenly checking this spontaneous feeling, he thought only of his child's happiness.

"No, no; not love, but—oh, papa, don't tell any one. I can trust you. I know I can. You see, mamma is worried so easily. It's no use telling her; but you are never worried. You've always done everything for everybody. I do believe there is no one like you in all the world."

How her words warmed his poor heart; but he only gently pinched her ear.

"Foolish child, what a flow of words! But what is this great misfortune?"

"It isn't any misfortune; at least, I suppose not; but I felt so miserable, so frightened. Fancy my being frightened! But promise you won't tell."

"Word of honor." Then quickly he added: "But you can trust me, Elva, can't you, without protestation?"

"Of course. You're the most honorable man I know! You couldn't betray any one. Well, it's about Walter Akister. He—he made me an offer, and I felt as if I must tell somebody. Amice would be angry; but you—you will be just."

Mr. Kestell did not in the least realize the scene Elva had passed through, or he would not have taken her words so quietly. His *sang-froid* made her fancy she was silly to have been afraid, for Elva was not yet learned in love. It was her first offer.

"And you do not love him, child? Don't mind me; tell me the exact fact. I only want your happiness, Heaven knows! even though—"

He was careful of not giving his own opinion of young Akister before knowing if Elva loved him, and he paused.

"No, no, papa; I don't love him; I can't bear him. He is so strange, so rough, so— No, no, there's nothing in him that I like; but—I am sorry for him."

Mr. Kestell breathed more freely.

"Don't be in a hurry, dear. Remember his family is all that can be desired. He has rank and wealth. I know Lord Cartmel is rich—richer than if he had large estates; and though his hobby, of course, is very expensive, yet he is very just; he will not injure his children."

The hand that held Elva's trembled a little. She knew not why; and hardly noticed it.

"Papa, that is like you to be so good. I knew you would understand; but what do I care about rank and wealth? You always say we shall have enough. We are rich, aren't we?"

"Rich," said Mr. Kestell, quietly, in a low voice, as if half to himself, "there are so many ways of understanding that word; but anyhow, child, you need not marry for money. I hope I have prevented that; on the other hand, remember that Walter Akister can not possibly love you for your money, there is no need of that. Only for yourself, my child."

"For myself!" said Elva, rising and standing in the half fire-light, half-reflected cloud-light. "Yes, I see that is a great thing; but, papa, I want to love, too. I know that I could love, only he must be more perfect than you are to make me love him better; and I never, never could love Walter Akister. Oh, papa! just think, who could?"

"I never, never could love Walter Akister." These words sunk deeply into Mr. Kestell's mind. Why, he hardly knew, as they were most natural, considering the subject of them!

"And you are quite sure your mind is made up? What do you want me to do?"

"That is what I wanted to speak to you about. Perhaps it isn't very generous of me to tell you all this; if I hadn't wanted very badly to tell somebody, I would have kept it to myself, for Walter's sake; but it is safe with you. You must appear not to know it, papa. Don't mention it to any one, not even to mamma, if you don't mind very much, because—"

"Your mother has a right to know, Elva."

"She might think that—oh, you know mamma believes in the aristocratic people she came from. Our family, papa, wasn't so aristocratic; but just as good and noble, for all that! I'm proud of being a commoner; you believe me, don't you? I wouldn't be a lord's daughter for any-

thing. One is more free, and then one can hold one's head just as high!"

The girl knelt down beside her father and put her arms round his neck, and laid her soft cheek against his furrowed face.

"Dear, dear papa, keep my secret, and you do believe me, don't you, when I say I would much rather be Kestell of Greystone's daughter than Lady Cartmel?"

Sometimes out of the mouth of babes come very sharp swords.

CHAPTER IX.

SECOND SIGHT.

Every one has noticed that if some event which appears to us personally of importance takes place, it is very often followed by another. We can look back at certain years that seemed crowded by these so-called "turning-points;" we can trace the net-work for a little space, till, feeling giddy, as if we watched too closely a very varied landscape from a high tower, we are glad to give up the scrutiny, and go down to a lower level. But even as these events are taking place, we are conscious that they do not come singly, and that the proverb "Misfortunes never come alone," has a strange truth in it, so that one wonders if the events of our lives have cycles like comets and meteoric showers.

Mr. Kestell's interview with Elva, full as it was of strange happiness for him, was not one of unmixed joy. He was more disturbed than he cared to own about young Akister. He must, of course, keep Elva's secret; and he hoped neither the young man nor his father would speak to him on the subject, for, of course, his "little girl" must please herself. But it was unfortunate, very. To look at Walter Akister, one could not fancy him in love. Elva was right. But, apart from the man himself, his position was all that could be desired. Was his wife right, and ought his girls to have more advantages? All these thoughts passed through his brain that evening when he went as usual out of the front door to the bridge, where he could see the placid waters of the Pool. Summer or winter, wet or fine, Mr. Kestell always walked out to the bridge after wishing his wife good-night. Sometimes he only stayed a

minute; sometimes, if the evening were fine, or the moon shining, he would stop a little while.

The autumn evening was perfect; the moon bright and soft; a little thin cloud was stretching right across her face like a man's hand trying to hide her beauty. The Pool was placid and still; only now and then a water-rat splashed in from the bank, or a moor-hen was disturbed.

Mr. Kestell was not thinking of beauty as he stood there. For beauty to affect us we must have a heart free from care, and bring our offering of a calm spirit to her shrine.

Suddenly he turned, and there, close beside him, stood Amice. Mr. Kestell was startled for half a second. He had not heard her coming. And then he was angry with her for startling him; and yet he would not have owned to either feeling for the world.

"You, Amice? Won't you catch cold?"

As well as frightening her father, however, it seemed that Amice was herself nervous. The hand that held her white shawl trembled.

"Elva is playing, papa; so I thought I would tell you before I forgot—"

Yes, across the narrow strip of lawn at the side of the house came the sounds of a piano, full-toned and well-played. But to-night the strains were melancholy.

"Forgot what, Amice?"

Mr. Kestell did not alter his tone, which was gentle and kind. Still Amice hesitated. She hardly knew herself: only she was afraid of her father, and he could not bear to see this fear. How different from Elva's love and confidence!

"I forgot to mention that Symee told me that her brother's holiday was to begin to-morrow. I went down to the farm to-day, and asked Mrs. Deeprose to get his room ready as usual."

"Oh, yes, of course, of course. Still, my dear, you might have mentioned it earlier in the day; I would have gone down myself to see that everything was ready."

Mr. Kestell was returning hastily to the house, and Amice was by his side. She had on her simple evening dress of white serge, and was not given to being fashionable, having, as Miss Heaton put it, "much too flowing ideas about dress for a girl who went to church."

Mr. Kestell was not a man who understood fashion in

female attire; but he knew that Elva always looked well-dressed, and, like other people, only nicer, while Amice was always strangely attired, he knew not in what.

"Jesse Vicary is easily satisfied; besides, he feels quite at home at the farm. What I wanted to add, papa, if you will not mind—might we not let Symee go there, too, for a few days? Mrs. Deeprose can put her up; and for a little while she would be happy with her brother all alone."

"But, my dear Amice, your mother—what will she say?"

"I can take Symee's place—I am sure I can; mamma is accustomed to my doing things for her."

"Not at all suitable. And, indeed, I don't know—"

They entered the drawing-room, where Elva was playing; but she jumped up as she saw them coming in.

"Papa, isn't it good of Amice? I told her to go and ask you. You must agree; think of the pleasure they will have. I'm sure, if Amice and I were separated nearly all the year, we should want to be quite—quite alone for a long, long time."

"Settle it among yourselves," said Mr. Kestell, quietly; "but I insist on your mother's wishes being first consulted. Now sing something, one of you, before I go to my study. I have some work to-night."

Mr. Kestell sat down with the paper; but he saw Amice shake her head when Elva tried to make her sing. So it was Elva who entertained him; and her sweet, clear voice, so full of joy and hope, made him forget the annoyance he felt at Amice's request.

When he was gone the two girls were left alone, and then it was that Amice appeared gradually to thaw, like a winter flower brought into a warm room. There was a little sigh of relief when at last she went up to Elva, who was gazing out of the one window which was allowed not to be shut.

Elva was thinking over Walter Akister's words, and wishing she had not been out alone upon the moor; but she was recalled to the present by Amice's arm round her neck, and feeling a kiss imprinted on her forehead.

"Oh, Elva darling, don't have anything to do with him; he would make you unhappy."

Elva visibly started.

"With whom?"

"Walter Akister; I know you are thinking of him."

Elva, for the first time in her life, looked at her sister with a troubled look in her eyes.

"Amice dear, what do you mean? How could you tell? Did papa—"

Amice knelt down, and hid her face in her sister's shoulder.

"Don't ask me any questions, dearest. I shall have to answer you, and I don't want to. It is not my fault; perhaps it is because we are sisters; I have read of it in books, I think, but sometimes it frightens me myself. Don't be angry, Elva—that would only add to my misery."

"Angry with you, Amice—how could I be? We have shared everything together, haven't we, ever since we were tinies? But this one thing I thought I ought not to tell you, and then you—you—come and tell it to me. I don't understand."

Amice rose up and stood close to the window, the strange, weird light falling on her, and making her deathly pale features appear almost supernatural.

"I don't wonder," she said, clasping her hands, "that you do not understand it. I do not either. Do you remember the evening of Mrs. Eagle Bennison's dinner-party? Well, it was then it came to me for the first time. I had been thinking of all the great things women have done for the good of others, and I wanted to be like them in the least particular. I seemed to wish to give up all these riches that surround us, and which every day made me love poverty the more; and then, after a long time— Oh, dear Elva, keep my secret; tell no one—promise me."

Elva nodded her head silently.

"It was then, as I knelt on the floor, lost in thought, that a new, strange feeling came over me. I can not explain it; but I seemed to see things differently. I seemed to understand what others were feeling, not by word or picture, but by some sense that was quite different from anything I had ever known before. I felt that Symee was upstairs suffering and wanted me, and I went, and then—I was frightened myself to find it was true."

"But about Mr. Akister," said Elva, still inclined to think that Amice was ill; and that she had overtired herself with tramping about to the cottages.

"That came suddenly; because it is not always with me

this power, or gift, or curse. It comes and goes, and I am afraid of it; afraid of-using it wrongly; afraid of despising it if it is a gift of Heaven. Elva, never tell any one."

"I never will," said Elva, feeling that, if she did, some might pronounce her sister mad. "I believe you have been overtiring yourself, and worrying about—being too good, I think. I never feel like that. I love everything that I can enjoy, and I can not see the harm of it."

"No, no; not for you. Don't think I am blaming you, Elva. How could I, when I love you more than any one on earth? Perhaps it is love that is teaching me. I seem to read your thoughts just now, just as if you had spoken aloud."

Elva did not believe this, though she was forced to acknowledge that Amice was right about Walter Akister; but the whole thing was so strange, so uncanny, that she put away the belief in it. The only true thing was that her sister Amice was too good, and wanted to be taken out more among other people.

"I was thinking of Walter Akister, it is true; but what else could you see, you naughty thought-reader?"

Amice smiled now. Elva took the revelation in such a matter-of-fact manner that she was a little comforted.

"Nothing except that Walter Akister was wanting you to do something, and that you were wavering, and I felt I must speak and tell you to be firm."

Elva laughed brightly now, as she kissed Amice.

"'Second thoughts are best,' is the saying; so first thoughts may be wrong, and yours are wrong, quite wrong. Walter Akister did ask me something this afternoon; but I never had the slightest idea of saying 'Yes,' and I never, never shall. Set your mind at rest about that, and don't believe these pictures."

Amice was not hurt or offended, only relieved. She tried to put away the idea of harm to Elva—that was all she cared about.

"But about Symee—how could I have known?" she added after a moment.

"Why, Amice, you are always thinking that some one or other wants you, and worrying your brains about people in trouble. It is fortunate that we live together, or you would soon be ruined. By the way, have you spent all your

allowance? You will want a new dress soon. Papa, I saw, noticed the shabby serge, though he said nothing."

"Did he? I am sorry. I have spent every penny. That old Jeffrey Hull has been so long out of work that I lent him some."

"Papa or Mr. Heaton would have done it. Oh, dear Amice, you ought to have no money!"

"I wish I had none. How it would help one to be good to be obliged to earn one's daily bread. Think of all the people who have no capital. What would Catherine of Sienna have said to have been rich? She never could have been."

"Oh, dear Amice, that was all very well for those days; people admired rags, and visions, and miracles then; but now nobody does really. It's much nicer to be very rich and give great sums to build people's palaces, and markets, and things of that sort, than to go about looking saintly. You know doctors only put it down to want of nerve-power, or morbid feelings; so it's no use at all. Then, Amice, don't mind if I say something else. I wish you wouldn't look so shy and frightened when you speak to papa. He is so dear and good he pretends not to see it; but I know his nature, and he does. He is so good to us that I can't bear his feelings being hurt."

Amice had begun her slow pacing by the drawing-room windows; there was such a hush everywhere this evening that the low, soft footfall of the girl was almost ghostly.

"I can't help it," she said, covering her face. "Elva, you don't know how hard I try to be quite, quite natural with him. This evening, when I went out on the bridge, I said I would speak to him as I did to you or to mamma; but, directly I came near to him, it all came over me and overpowered me."

"What came over you?" said Elva, quickly.

"That—I mean shyness, I suppose. Just as if I were being paralyzed. It is worse than fear; oh, it is misery!"

Evidently Amice could not be well, and Elva formed a plan of taking her to a doctor; but, once again, with her strong vitality and strength of will, Elva changed the conversation.

"Anyhow, it's all right about Symee. Have you told here Jesse Vicary comes to-morrow! How he will enjoy the country after that terrible, stuffy London. I wonder

if he has seen Mr. Hoel Fenner again. Now, Amice, come and sing that song you set to music the other evening. Instead of moping you ought to be a *prima-donna*. Oh, dear, I wish you had taken a fancy to the stage, you would have looked lovely, and it's easier for ladies now to sing in public than to get rid of all their money, as you wish to do."

Amice laughed softly. She was very fascinating when she looked at all happy.

"What a terrible idea: I would rather die than go behind foot-lights. Think of the power of all those hundreds of eyes."

"Yes, the power to applaud—I should like that."

"I would rather sing in the dirtiest room in a back slum than in a theater," and Amice, sitting down, sung, in a rich and wondrously soft contralto, the following well-known words, which she had set to music:

> "When shall I see the land where I would tread,
> That shrine where I would fain bow knee and head?
> In autumn—ere the autumn pass, I said;
> In winter—ere the winter time is sped;
> In spring—ere yet spring's fair sweet feet are fled;
> In summer—ere the summer time is shed—
> And now I say, perchance when I am dead."

"Amice, how beautiful!" exclaimed her sister. "Will you sing it to papa to-morrow?"

Amice rose abruptly.

"Don't ask me, don't ask me to do that. I can't help it; but when papa comes near to me at the piano—sometimes even when he is only in the room—my voice goes. It is stupid, but how can one help being afraid? If only I were like you, and could be a comfort to him."

It was useless arguing, and Elva gave it up. She only knew that she herself loved Amice, and felt anxious about her state of health: but it was hard that the two she loved the best could so little understand each other.

CHAPTER X.

COUNTRY-BORN.

THE Home Farm was situated on the right hand of the Pools, and some way up the moor on the opposite side of

the Beacon; and was, in fact, at the edge of the great hills before described as the Forest of Alden. All the farm land had originally been reclaimed from the moor; and certainly nothing could exceed the wild beauty of its surroundings, though it left much to be desired in point of fertility. However, some of these upland meadows produced fair pasture for the sleek Alderneys; and money being plentiful, the farm served its purpose well, and gave an honest living to Eli Deeprose and his wife Hannah. The farm-house was an old picturesque dwelling, with gables and stacks of chimneys which pointed to the days when it had been the manor, when manors were by no means the palatial places they have since become.

The way to the farm was up a narrow valley branching off from the road by the Pools. A little stream meandered sluggishly on one side, and on the other sloping fir woods and larch plantations made eternal music. Then the ground rose more precipitously, and the wood being past, the path now ran by a few meadows and corn-fields—the harvest at present not yet gathered in—diversified by here and there a hop-garden. Then, further still, the farm buildings, with its old garden and its stack-yard, its cow-sheds, and pig-sties; and after this, high up, came the always rising stretch of forest land, till the eye reached the summit where, high above the farm, stood the Crow's Nest clump, apparently lording it over all the lower lands as an eagle aloft upon mountain crags.

Every noble feeling seemed to be fostered by that special spot, and the noble desire for freedom was firmly implanted in the heart of the dwellers of the soil by the vast sweep of those grand high moors, which spoke to the heart of man of the purest and highest self-respect, and of giving him, with the breath of his nostrils, the command to labor honestly for his daily bread, and by the sweat of his brow to learn true freedom and true patriotism.

"Who would not be country-born, country-bred, in such a spot?"

Such was Jesse Vicary's feeling as, finding himself, by a miracle it seemed to him, at Greystone, he took his modest bag in his hand, and walked with eager, fervent impatience to the farm. He had been born among those moors; his earliest recollections were intwined with happy memories of the woods, of the farm sounds and sights and works;

and, best of all, of all those miles and miles of the moorland forest, which seemed, like eternity, to have no end.

The moment Jesse set foot in his county, though no parent voice was there to welcome him, and no home of his own awaited him, he felt happy; he could throw off the feeling of his life's burden; he could forget that such things as sin and misery existed; he could fancy no such place as London existed, and no such street as Golden Sparrow knew him. He experienced the intoxication of nature, the feeling that earth called to him as her own, and that he answered her by saying, as in old school-boy days: "Adsum."

Once more now he came gladly to her call, and only those who have experienced this feeling can understand what was the tumultuous joy that filled his whole being as he at last passed the gray walls of Rushbrook House.

It was late afternoon, and being now so near his destination, Jesse sat down on an old bent oak bough, where, quite hidden from view, he could see the house and the old bridge without being seen, should any of the Kestells come out.

Jesse felt a vague hope that Symee might feel his near presence, and would run out for a moment; he had not been able to tell her his train, and he was too shy to go to the house, having, besides, an undefined dislike of going to any one's back door, and not sure whether, his sister being merely a servant, he might assert his independence by going to the front entrance. He preferred doing neither; and, well hidden, he gazed longingly at the familiar sight.

The old bridge stood in the midst of trees and undergrowth; a shallow brook, spanned by its great arch—one side of which was rough and uneven from the falling away of some masonry; while the remaining weather-stained gray stones were crested with dark-green ivy—trickled slowly, making music like the ringing of tiny silver bells. Below and above one only saw a tangle of boughs, through which the sunlight glinted here and there, just flecking the little brown stream beneath with spots of gold.

How Jesse devoured all this with his eyes, and his heart seemed to thank Heaven, with the sincerity of a man receiving a priceless gift, for once more beholding all this with his bodily eyes. He gazed at the water, which quietly trickled toward him between its moss-grown banks and the

moss-covered stones in its bed. The fields outside were bathed in sunlight, but the oaks and silver birches around him almost hid the blue sky; while, behind, the tall, red stems of the fir wood stood like guarding sentinels.

Jesse listened; there was no sound but the voice of the stream, a few notes of a bird, and, all at once, the bark of a dog.

He looked up to the bridge, feeling he must pass on, when suddenly he saw some one standing there.

Jesse, though he at once identified Miss Amice Kestell, said to himself that he had never seen such a beautiful woman before. He took in every line of the head, of the neck, of the arm leaning on the bridge. He noted the pale, marble-like face, and the eyes, cast downward to the stream, so that they seemed almost closed. He even noted the white hat, with a great gray ostrich feather, which looked like a little soft, gray cloud that had floated down to rest like an aureole round that head. But, most of all, Jesse noted the wondrously calm expression, as if no thought of earth were troubling the dreamer.

It was not love that made all his pulses quicken at this sight; not any earthly idea of common love came even into his mind; it was more like worship given to some angelic being, which might suddenly appear on our path.

Doubtless these feelings were partly engendered by Symee's repeated praises of Miss Amice; doubtless, at this moment, his grateful heart glorified every object he saw; perhaps, too, Nature refuses to show her best unless she can place a beautiful jewel in her most lovely setting. Whatever might be the natural reasons of the sudden transformation and the immediate result of sight upon feeling, certain it is that not stronger was the effect of the sight of Beatrice upon Dante than of Amice Kestell upon this unknown, unendowed Jesse Vicary.

Jesse was so utterly overcome with this new feeling that, even when Amice passed on, after a few minutes' meditation on the bridge, he sat on, gazing at the place where she had been; and when at last he rose and climbed up the path and himself crossed the bridge, he would, had he not feared being seen, have kissed the foot-print Amice had made on the sandy way. Jesse did nothing of the kind, however; but he passed the Rushbrook property, passed up the valley, turned into the track leading to the farm, and,

always ascending, reached it, without having been once conscious of anything but the image of Amice upon his mind's eye.

In sight of the familiar homestead, however, he partially recovered himself. You can not go into a house dreaming. The ordinary commonplaces of common life are powerful restoratives to distraction; and, with a mighty effort, Jesse shook off his new bliss.

All at once he was entirely roused, for, at the open door, and running toward him with a glad exclamation, was his own twin sister, Symee.

There was no one in the house; every one was out, busy at various farm labors. Mrs. Deeprose was in the dairy, on the other side of the farm-house, and only the eyes of Nature beheld the meeting.

"Oh, Jesse, Jesse, there you are. I thought you would never come."

"How could I guess you were here?" said Jesse, now quite himself, for Symee was his second self—no vision—but the twin sister he was looking for. "Do you know, Symee, I sat down opposite Rushbrook House, hoping you might come out by chance."

"Oh, you stupid boy! and all the time I was here. Why didn't you guess it?"

"How could I expect they would spare you?"

Symee, still clinging to him, laughed as she had not laughed since she had last seen him, and her sweet, gentle, though not beautiful or remarkable face was beautified by love.

"Well, if it had not been for Miss Amice, you would not have seen me here. Isn't she good, Jesse? She asked Mrs. Kestell to spare me, and came down here herself to arrange about my staying at the farm; and, just imagine, she is going to take my place. She did it all so kindly; not a bit as if she were doing me a favor, but just as if it were my right."

"She is an angel," said Jesse, from the bottom of his heart.

"Well, something very like it. She is not like any other young lady I have ever seen. But now tell me—oh, tell me everything, only first come in, tea is ready on the table and the kettle is boiling. Oh, Jesse, this is happiness."

What a thousand little nothings these two said to each

other as they sat by the homely table, eating their modest meal, which, to Jesse, tasted sweet indeed after his long, hot summer of London life. Symee asked him about his work, his friends, his acquaintances, interspersed now and then with inquiries about his wardrobe, the new shirts she was making him, the careless fashion in which he tied his tie; and he, delighted to hear a woman's soft voice taking him to task in this manner, laughed and defended himself, till, tea finished, he insisted on taking her out upon the moors, after first paying a visit to Mrs. Deeprose in her dairy. The Deeprose pair had only been a few years at the farm, and were not the couple Jesse remembered in his childhood; still, they were good friends enough, and just on those pleasant terms when nothing is expected on one side or the other but pleasant words. Jesse always paid for his lodging and board in spite of Mr. Kestell's repeated orders to the contrary; but the pleasure of feeling independent was too great, now it was attained, to be easily parted with.

Now walking up toward the Crow's Nest, while the shadows were lengthening and the clouds deepening into gorgeous crimson in the west, it was Jesse's turn to tell his sister of his good fortune.

"I have sent in my work, Symee," he exclaimed, after having told her of Mr. Fenner's visit; "and it may lead to some more work, but I dare not think of that. Perhaps he will write to me here. I gave him my address. Anyhow, it seems like a new life. I want to write something more congenial than those eternal tons of coals."

Their feet were pressing down the springy heather; the breeze gathering energy as they climbed higher, brought new strength to Jesse's hopes. Any feet that may have been born to tread on heather will never again forget the feeling; the very muscular exertion required where the heather is thick and high is joy to such; the black peat ruts, the little gleaming pools, the crisp, dead branches of twig, the searching for the hidden sundew, the color of the asphodel, and the scent of the bog myrtle, all these, and a hundred other sights on a moor, go to make up that heather-sickness, which seizes the Scotch when far from home, or the dwellers of the Surrey heaths when they wander into towns or upon down lands.

Oh! downs are beautiful, and many wonderful things can

be seen there: but all these can be easily dispensed with by heath lovers if you will give them back their forest.

For a few moments Symee shared her brother's hopes and feelings. He had so much more powerful a nature that it was easy to drag her along with him, spiritually speaking; but every human being has a certain amount of power of resistance; otherwise strange sights would be seen: armies of pilgrims going to the same place; numberless panics; slavish imitations; but to prevent this the force of the unit comes in; and, just before they reach Crow's Nest, Symee paused.

"Jesse dear, you don't mean to say you would forget all Mr. Kestell has done, and that you would forsake the coals?"

Symee was good and gentle; but, in spite of her unit force, she was not imaginative. Coals seemed to her sufficient to warm any one's energy.

"Coals of fire you think Mr. Kestell would heap on my head? What can it matter to him what I do, so that I earn an honest living? I do not want to do more than that—a living for you and for me."

"But I am sure Mr. Kestell would not like it. He seemed quite anxious the other day about your keeping steadily to your present work."

"Don't be afraid, Symee; I shall do nothing rash. But without saying anything disrespectful—though I never can forget what I owe him, yet I am a man now, and I must be free. Heaven gives us a certain freedom in our lives, in order to make us understand the true bondage, I think."

He spoke in a brave voice, which denoted strength and honesty of purpose, so that Symee was a little reassured.

"You must not speak of me as if I were going to take all your hard-earned savings, Jesse dear," she added, as they proceeded higher. "You must marry and be happy, and I shall come and stay with you. Oh, that will be great enough happiness for me."

"Marry!" Jesse shook his head. "I could not marry unless I saw a woman who would come up to my ideas of 'a perfect woman, nobly planned,' as Wordsworth says. And just imagine, Symee, what such a woman would say to me!"

Jesse laughed, but not bitterly.

"She would say, if she were worth anything, that you were better than any one else in the world."

"No one will ever say that but you, silly one."

And then the silence of the hills fell upon the brother and sister.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHANCE OF NEW WORK.

JESSE was too happy for thought; but without the help of thought or words he seemed lifted into a region of intense happiness. He had been given the best gift since his arrival at Rushwood—the power to worship beauty and goodness without in a perfectly unselfish manner. Once bring in man's self and you bring in man's pain. As yet the pain had not come.

The next day he took a walk with Symee along the valley of the Four Pools, and all the time he seemed to feel more than to think: "I may, perhaps, see her; she may be sitting on one of the bridges, or bending down near some corner of the bank making the water happy by reflecting her."

All the thoughts of the true worshiper can not be written, because the very channel of words seems to spoil them, like the bloom that is brushed off from the fruit which is picked by rough, careless hands. Words are not subtle enough for such feelings, unless a Dante may string them together.

But fact often triumphs over imagination, and, to-day, no Amice appeared in the valley. Still it was happiness for Jesse. Not getting what he wanted did not make him despise what he had; he was not used to many good times, and he knew how to appreciate what he got.

Another merry tea-party, this time joined by Mr. and Mrs. Deeprose, after which, like a school-boy, Jesse begged if he might feed the chickens, some of whose pens were near the fir wood a little way down.

Symee was tired, and stayed to help to wash up the tea things. She was not used to this sort of work, and it pleased and amused her as something new; and, so doing, she bestowed many blessings on Amice as she rubbed the plates dry and watched Jesse going off whistling. He had been telling them about poor Milly Diggings, and Mrs.

Deeprose said she would send her a hamper of good things when Jesse returned.

Now it happened, when Jesse had fed the chickens, and looked with intense pleasure at the merry multitude and their quaint ways of showing pleasure and anger, that, still whistling, he sauntered further on. The red stems of the firs were catching the sunlight; the brown needles below appeared almost scarlet, and the patches of bracken by the side like sheets of gold flung carelessly down. Jesse looked and noted, as he had looked and noted in his childhood; and want of human sympathy had made him notice the world of Nature, and she had, therefore, revealed many secrets to him.

All at once his meditation was stopped by the sound of a tune whistled very sweetly and correctly, and the slash of a stick against the ferns. There, round the corner, came a boy with a letter-bag—the post-boy who brought the letters from the Beacon post-office and took away what there might be to go. Mr. Kestell paid for this honor, otherwise the inhabitants of this lonely district might have tramped up to the post-office at Rushbrook Beacon for their letters. The boy was a late institution, and knew not Jesse; but he soon thawed under Jesse's influence. A boy knows sooner than any one who means friendship to him, and he drew his letter forth with triumph.

"Be you Mister J. Vicary? Here's a letter for you."

Jesse took it and finished a country talk with the boy before he walked on, down a lane where the blackberries were luxuriously overtopping the hedge, and the big dewberries looked luxurious to town-tied Jesse. The lane ended at the foot of a small hill where the firs began again. Jesse made a bound on to the needle-strewn brown carpet, and opened his letter. He knew the handwriting; it was from Hoel Fenner.

It was a short letter, but it seemed to take a long time to read. Jesse sat and stared at it, and read it and reread it, and then finally stood up against a tall, red-fir trunk.

Thus ran the letter:

"Dear Vicary,—The editor of 'The Current Reader' was much pleased with your work. The whole paper was so business-like, and yet cleverly reported, that, if you really mean what you told me, I believe we can offer you

a post at the office which may lead to something better. We want a man whom we can send where we like to take reports, and do all kinds of other literary work in spare time, which is above ordinary hack-work, and which will show if you could get further up the ladder.

"I think the best way will be for me to come down on Saturday till Monday to stay with my friend Mr. Heaton, and I will then speak myself to Mr. Kestell about the matter. I quite understand that you might find it a delicate matter to transact alone. Don't thank me; I was much impressed with the scenery at Rushbrook, and I want to see it again. The pay would at first be the same as what you are now receiving, but would be increased very soon if you were found to be the right man in the right place. Yours truly,

"HOEL FENNER."

No wonder Hoel put in "don't thank me," knowing all the time he should earn much gratitude, because in his heart he knew a letter would have been quite as useful as an interview. And the excuse about scenery was a cloak for quite other reasons; but then, such is human nature! Hoel had got a first-rate excuse for seeing Elva Kestell again, and he seized it, though even to himself he pretended—for no pretense is greater than that we carry on between our two natures—that it was really necessary he should go down and interview Mr. Kestell about this new proposal for his protégé.

Jesse stood some time rooted to the spot, with his back against the fir, and his heart swelling with thankfulness. Only now did he fully realize how burdensome had been his uncongenial work, how his whole being turned toward books, and literature, and literary work. It seemed to him that had his own well-being alone been in the question, he would long ago have thrown over the coals and begun at the lowest rung of the ladder which he had longed to climb. But then Symee had always been part of the question, and no uncertainty might be thought of for her sake. But now all was changed; there could be no pecuniary loss. On the contrary, there was a prospect of quickly increasing his income, and thereby a nearer prospect of being able to send for his sister. What added to the joy was his having received the news here in his own dearly loved woods, with

the autumn winds playing in the branches, as if they wished to add a rejoicing accompaniment to his thoughts.

If Jesse had been told he had inherited a large fortune, he would not have felt half the joy that the prospect of this work gave him.

After a time his thoughts turned to his friends in Golden Sparrow Street. It seemed almost hard that this good thing should have come to him, and that he could not share it with his poorer friends; for Jesse had a nature which joy has the effect of making more tender to others. The impulse of the best childhood, to share everything with those present, had never left him.

It was at this moment of intense joy that Jesse, looking up, saw the well-known form of Mr. Kestell slowly coming down the hill. It was some moments before the young man moved; and during these moments he watched with deep reverence the man who had helped him to reach the pinnacle of joy he now stood upon. How often he had seen in his mind's eye the venerable head with its handsome features, its benevolent eyes, its gray hair just touching the coat collar! All was photographed on Jesse's brain, even to the thin, nervous hands, and the cut of his coat just a little antiquated, but in perfect harmony with the whole man.

"He is coming to see me," thought Jesse. So, reluctantly leaving his fir-tree, he walked quickly down through the fir-needles, and stepping over a ditch at the bottom, found himself close to Mr. Kestell.

It so happened that Mr. Kestell had been deep in thought, and not thinking of finding Jesse here, started visibly as the young man suddenly stood beside him.

"I saw you coming, sir," said Jessie, by way of apology for startling him, "and I thought if you were coming to see me, I might save you the rest of the walk."

Mr. Kestell held out his hand, and Jesse took it, remembering more that he was Amice's father than his own benefactor. It was a new glory to add to many others which, in Jesse's mind, crowned the gray hairs with an ever-bright aureole.

"Thank you. I did not expect you here, Vicary, but I am very glad to see you. I was coming to the farm; but now you are here, I need go no further. If it falls in with

your plans, I shall be glad if you will walk back to Rushbrook with me."

Jesse turned round with an exclamation of pleasure.

"I should like it above all things, sir. This road seems to me more beautiful every time I see it. I must thank you very much for allowing my sister to come to the Home Farm; it is a pleasure which I had not expected."

Jesse spoke so simply and so heartily that it was, or would have been to most people, a pleasure to hear him. There was not the least cringing in his tone, but rather a deep respect, which, given freely, is an honor to any man to give or to receive.

"And you are quite comfortable at the farm? The Deeproses are good and kind people."

As he spoke, Mr. Kestell glanced at Jesse, though without looking him full in the face.

"Yes; they are not, of course, the same as my old friends; but one can not expect that. Mrs. Norton is still alive, I hear, at Greystone."

"Yes, I give her a little pension; but she is getting very old now; I doubt if she will live to enjoy it much longer. She does not care to see people now."

"I'm sorry for that; I should have liked to have talked over old times."

There was a little silence, then Mr. Kessel said:

"And you are quite settled with Card & Lilley? It is a very solid firm; no fear of any disaster with them in the commercial line. I am extremely glad they were able to give you the post you occupy now. But anyhow they would have given you good recommendations to another firm. You have always been steady and attentive."

Mr. Kestell seemed to be repeating his thoughts more than saying something that required any answer; and Jesse, feeling he must wait now for Mr. Fenner's arrival, said nothing, though he felt somewhat guilty of the next remark.

"You will see, Vicary—or I do not doubt that you have already done so—that in business it is of the greatest importance for a young man to have testimonials of long service in the same house. A few more years of this same kind of work, and you will be sure to get employment somewhere, even if Card & Lilley were to fail. I think I

may say your future is assured; and this thought is a great comfort to me."

"Thank you, sir," said Jesse, quietly; he was beginning to feel uneasy as to what Mr. Kestell might say of his change of employment.

There was another pause, and Jesse was wishing he might speak out openly, for concealment was very foreign to him; so, plunging into a subject which was nearly related to the one he must not yet mention, he said:

"I was wishing to tell you, sir, that I ought to say—"

Mr. Kestell stopped short, and looked quickly at Jesse.

"What is it?" he said, very gently.

"That my greatest wish is some day to make a home for my sister. I have been trying to find a little extra work in order—"

Mr. Kestell and Vicary had now reached the road by the Pools. There had been a little clearing made close by the water, so as to allow a view across. This evening it reflected the crimson clouds so that one little corner looked like blood. Above, the silvery birches bent toward the Pool, as if ready to plunge into the bosom of the life-giving water. A few reeds, with brown, withered tips, stood up stiff and straight, while the arrow-head at their base swayed slightly in the ripple.

If Mr. Kestell noticed any of these sights before interrupting, it must have been the crimson water, which was for a few moments very striking; but Jesse looked at this and more, because, as a boy, he had often stood here and watched each smile, each movement on the face of Nature.

"I do not advise you, Vicary, to entertain this thought; Symee is perfectly happy and contented at Rushbrook. I even questioned her on this very subject a little while ago. You would only take her to a very pinched state of existence, which she has not been accustomed to—"

"Symee is very brave, and we are twins; we have no other ties. I believe you once told me, sir, that when my grandmother died, I had no other relation who could take me in; in fact, that there were none to take pity on such poor specimens of mortality."

Vicary spoke a little lightly to hide his real feeling.

"None that I could find; otherwise, of course, I should not have taken you out of—" Mr. Kestell hesitated, "out of their care."

Jesse had grown up with the knowledge that Mr. Kestell had befriended him; it did not enter his head to ask why he had thus acted.

Whether Jesse might now have revealed Mr. Fenner's offer, to show cause why Symee should leave Rushbrook, had an interruption not occurred at this moment, must remain doubtful; but, just as they were passing the Pool, Mr. Guthrie suddenly appeared, and put an end to further talk.

With his usual kind geniality, George Guthrie greeted Jesse warmly. If he were a Conservative, and of a good old English family, he certainly prided himself more on his warm heart than on his birth. He never made any one feel that they were beneath him.

"Why, Vicary; you here? Very glad to see you; I'm particularly glad to know you are alive and well, because I've been hearing your praises sung so much lately. I began to fancy you must be a myth. It's a very bad omen when all men speak well of one, I believe, though as I've never experienced this universal approbation, I shouldn't know what to do with it, eh, Mr. Kestell? Now, if I could have earned your good character, I should do my best to keep it up; but I was called an idle vagabond so early in life, that I grew into my character with the same ease as a mongrel puppy becomes a mongrel dog. I've been the patient peg to hang my bad name upon so long, that now I should be sorry to lose it. When I take to literature, I shall write an essay on character, and prove entirely that it's made for us, and that it's humbug to say we make it for ourselves."

Jesse felt at his ease at once; somehow, Mr. Kestell had had the opposite effect upon him.

"Indeed, Mr. Guthrie, I'm only too glad to come back to Rushbrook, whatever my reputation may be. But if you got it from Mr. Fenner, I fear it's worth little. He's been very kind to me, that's all."

"No, he was not my informant; but never mind. You see that one's secret sins and virtues are found out without our knowing in this small world. I assure you, that is the only motive that prevents me doing all kinds of wickedness. I say, if I could do this, and no one know I would; but there's the rub. Actions seem to me to be always accompanied by the cranes of Ibicus."

"I must be going in," said Mr. Kestell, quickly. "I shall see you again, Vicary, before you go. Guthrie, won't you come in and see the ladies?"

"Well, yes, I will; I hear Amice singing, and she would draw me anywhere, when she does that; but she's like a mermaid—can't often be caught combing her hair and singing her unearthly songs. Good-evening, Vicary; I shall come and call on you at the farm, and we'll have a good talk."

They were near the front gate, and the two gentlemen went in. While Jesse pretended to cross the bridge, as if he were going for a walk; but very soon he returned and listened. He was but a poor man's son, he might not go within the sacred precinct that contained her; but no one could prevent him listening. As he listened, Jesse Vicary's soul seemed filled with great thoughts of the future. Could not a man climb the ladder of fame till, whatever his birth, men would be proud to know him, and women would admire him for himself? There was no bitterness about the present in this thought—only a great hope for the future. Some day Amice Kestell might be proud to have known him.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRONG ATTRACTION.

Hoel Fenner found great difficulty in getting rid of Miss Heaton after lunch on the Saturday when, quite against his better judgment, he had run down from town to Rushbrook. To do Clara Heaton justice, she had not the least idea or intention of getting married; her work was to prevent her brother from committing such folly, and this work allowed no rival object; but, on the other hand, Miss Heaton thought it her duty to find out the religious position of any young man she might ask to the vicarage. She had faint notions that the glorious work of converting a young masculine soul must rank very high indeed when the reckoning came; but by converting, Miss Heaton meant nothing at all like what is generally understood by that word. She considered the Salvation Army very low, and, being outwardly High Church, would not have asked any one if they were saved. When analyzed, Miss Heaton's feeling might have been called, by s[illegible]

natured persons, one of mere curiosity. She wanted to know exactly what were the religious opinions of her visitor. If they agreed with hers, then she merely abused all the other Church parties; if the opinions did not harmonize with hers, then she tried to show the visitor how very mistaken he was. It must be added, however, that Miss Heaton never held these conversations before Herbert; even for her it was difficult to be severe upon the religion of others in his presence, because Herbert Heaton seemed so much the embodiment of charity that, without his making any objections, everything that was not seasoned with the greatest of gifts fell flat.

Miss Heaton found Mr. Fenner strangely unwilling to talk about his religious feelings, even though Herbert had left them alone to go to a clerical meeting at Greystone; and, stranger still, as soon as he politely could, Hoel Fenner said he had business with Mr. Kestell, and disappeared. Miss Heaton settled that she would find out Mr. Fenner's spiritual state on Sunday evening, when Herbert went off to a cottage service in a lonely hamlet some two miles away.

"From his answers to me, now, I very much fear Mr. Fenner is a Freethinker," said Clara Heaton, preparing to take out some beef-tea to a sick woman, "and, if so, I think I can soon show him how extremely wrong he is."

Hoel never gave his hostess another thought when he was once out upon the moor. He very much admired Herbert Heaton for being a man who, as far as he could find out, lived up to his belief, and who was a shepherd in deed as well as in name; but as for his sister, "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "why do such women exist? It must be to make religion more difficult to believe in."

Once with his back to the vicarage, Hoel Fenner gazed down upon Rushbrook House with a strange, new feeling of admiration. The great moor, with its yellow paths and its delicious scent of heather and gorse, filled him with a new life of feeling. He could see the gray house where she lived peeping out from a bower of tree-tops, as if stretching its neck to see above the oaks and beeches what was taking place on the open moor. Hoel looked about him to try and find the place where he had met Elva; but he was not near enough to it. Perhaps she would be walking or sketching to-day on this moor; why not look for her?

On the left of him was a copse of larch, and oak, and pine, which wandered irregularly down between two hills. Here the murmur of the wind seemed less harsh than in the plantation where only firs were found. To Hoel—at this moment emptied of himself, because Nature was so full of other thoughts and impressed them upon him, and because love had found a weak place in his armor—it appeared possible to him to forget himself in loving another. He wondered why he had never felt like this before; why he had spurned the idea of love; why he had hesitated and reasoned when, at last, he had seen the only woman who had appeared to him to rise out of a crowd, and, not by her special beauty or her special talent, but by an irresistible charm, to be to him the embodiment of woman.

"I have been a fool to argue about it. I fancied I was proof against all the fascinations of women; and now I find that I can't forget this girl who had no wish to fascinate me."

As this moment Jesse Vicary's affairs faded from his mind as if they were non-existent. All he wanted was to see Elva again, and to find out whether this new feeling would leave him as suddenly as it had attacked him.

Elva was sitting on the garden-seat with a book in her hands when she heard the click of the gate; and, to her surprise, she saw Hoel Fenner approaching her. She had time to note once more every line of his handsome face, and to think to herself that certainly she had never seen such a handsome man, and such a perfect gentleman. Even though the thought of the criticism at once rose to her mind, it was not without a feeling of pleasure that she rose from the seat and came forward to greet him.

"How strange you should come to Rushbrook to-day!" said Elva, so naturally that Hoel Fenner felt she was perfectly unconscious of his motive. He had come down with no anxiety as to the result; but her reception of him made him feel almost as if the former self-possessed Hoel were not the same as the present Hoel who was trying to appear natural.

"I—I dare say you are surprised to see me again so soon, Miss Kestell. I have come—partly on business. You remember my telling you about your father's protégé, Jesse Vicary? Well, I have ventured to come on his behalf. I wished to speak to Mr. Kestell about his future."

Hoel sat down on a chair which he placed a little on one side of Elva, so that he could watch her face. He seemed to see a new beauty in it. The expression seemed deepened, and less that of a wilful girl, and the idea seized him that perhaps Elva had a lover, and that he was not the first, and would have come down here in vain. This idea at once enhanced the value of the prize, for Hoel was a man who hated failure.

"Then you have come at a good time. Jesse Vicary is at the farm; but papa is, I am sorry to say, not at home to-day. He is going to dine with a gentleman at Greystone on business. I suppose you will stay till Monday; and if you don't mind leaving Mr. Heaton to-morrow evening, I know papa will be glad to see you. Come and dine with us."

Elva had forgotten that she did not mean Hoel to come and break bread in Knollsmere House, for some of her charm lay in that quick change of feeling which made it impossible to be sure how she would act.

"Thank you," he said; and then there was a pause, a pause which Hoel knew at any other time he would not have allowed in a conversation: but he was learning that he could fail in small talk.

"I am glad you can leave your work," said Elva, her dark-gray eyes suddenly flashing out a little defiant light. "I thought critics always read the stupid novels on Sunday, instead of going to church."

Hoel could not help smiling.

"You do not agree that the better the day the better the deed?"

"You know I disapprove of 'the deed;' or, rather, I dare say you have forgotten all about my thoughts on the subject."

"Indeed I have not. Perhaps you will not believe me if I say that I came here partly to be taught some more critical duties."

"You are saying this only as a compliment," said Elva, impatiently. "You forget that I am a constant reader of the 'Review' in which you write."

"Then you have perhaps read what I said of Hudson's book on 'The Laws That Govern Authors?'"

"Yes," said Elva, thoughtfully, leaning her cheek on her hand; "but I noticed that you did not say much about

suffering. I have often remembered what you said to me about it—that one could not write without having understood that word in some practical way."

Hoel remembered perfectly; but he had the power of saying many things well, which things, however, he never cared to put into practice. He was like Benvenuto Cellini, who fancied he saw a resplendent light hovering over his shadow. If Hoel thought of possible pain, he also fancied he would be able to have a resplendent light over it.

"I was, however," he rejoined, "much interested in that chapter of it which dealt of what men have accomplished when actuated by motives of despair."

Elva suddenly looked up, and one of her bright smiles flashed out amusement, so that Hoel felt a little nettled by it. It was just that touch in her of original thought which he admired, at the same time that he was a little afraid of its being used against himself. It seemed that this country girl might just find out that portion of him which was not entirely sincere. Hoel did not put this into words, he only felt it; but it made him more eager to make Elva acknowledge his superiority. The intricate motives which guide the actions of men and women are sometimes fathomed, as if by inspiration, by those of the opposite sex; and Elva had by chance done this now.

"I can't imagine your feeling despair about anything," she said, taking up the book she had been reading, and which she had put down. I am sure you would criticise your despair away if you ever had it."

"Then you disbelieve in anything spontaneous in me? How can I make you alter your opinion?"

Elva laughed now; it was the laugh of a bright, joyous woman on the threshold of a happy life. She was not going to tell her secret, even if she forgave Hoel; and something in him was beginning to attract her powerfully; it was the charm which had attracted many other persons, and which gave Hoel so many friends.

"Don't try to, because, if you knew me, you would understand that I never care to analyze opinions. A woman somehow guesses at truth without analyzing, as you clever men are accustomed to do. We like change, I suppose, and not to go always along the same lines."

"And do you like change so much?"

"Yes, I do. I like being honest, though I suppose I

shall shock you. I like change in all that is around me, and yet I like the same things to be always about me. Is that a contradiction? Amice says she is never sure what I shall like or dislike, and yet she knows me better than any one else. But how horrid to talk about one's self! Don't you think it is never one's self one talks about, but a person one has set up before one and called one's self? To talk about one's self is to talk about a definite person; and, in reality, I don't know myself at all; I can't be sure of what I shall do next, even when I have settled it definitely."

Elva rose up from her seat and laughed again. Hoel looked at her now in surprise. Yes, she was original; there was nothing about her of the silly woman, which personage could never have appealed to him, and yet there was a strange uncertainty which took one continually by surprise.

"You only experience what most of us do feel some time or other; except—yes, when we have a very definite object in view, and then we do not allow that changeable self its sway; we turn neither to the right hand nor the left. But that variableness of mind is always present in poetic natures. I fancy you must admire poetry. Your volume looks like a poet."

"Yes, I love poetry. It seems to me almost like wandering on our moors. This is Keats; do you like him?"

"A miniature painter in very bright colors; but he died too young to give us his full maturity of thought."

"Maturity of thought!" said Elva, impatiently, "that would not have been like this, it would have killed the best in him. He would have framed his mind after the pattern of critics, and we should have had a Keats who painted by rule."

Elva sat down, and turning over the pages of her little volume, she said:

"Do you know this, Mr. Fenner? What beauty would maturity have added to it?

"'Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness.'"

And she repeated half a dozen lines of this poem.

Hoel hardly heard the words, the music of the rich, clear voice was enough enchantment to a man in love. But was he in love? "Yes, certainly," he said, in answer to this

question. "No woman has ever before made me feel content to sit by her and listen to her."

Elva did not wait for any remark when she had done; perhaps she feared that Hoel would criticise something she loved, and happily Amice appeared at this moment, and Hoel found himself looking, with great interest, at Elva's sister for the first time. Neither was he to escape the strange feeling of having before him a being not fitted for common humanity, which, on the whole, rejects mystery as an insult to its understanding.

Elva went to meet her sister, and Hoel followed; and when he shook hands and noted the marble-like face and the lifeless touch of the hand, he wondered how two sisters could be so unlike each other. The one, beautiful, with health, life, color, and bright eyes flashing out intelligence like jewels in darkness; the other, cold as clay, unapproachable as a spirit form; and yet Elva seemed quite unconscious of the effect her sister must have on strangers.

"You must come in to tea," said Elva, thinking more that she would like Amice to see this noted, clever man than of any conscious feeling herself about him. "But come and stand a moment on our bridge, Mr. Fenner. We think the view from here is perfect, and the Pool is always giving us all new thoughts. Papa comes here every day after dinner; it's a habit. And I have seen you, Amice, lean over the parapet for ten minutes without moving. Generally, however, my sister is to be found in dirty cottages."

"That is quite a fashionable taste," said Hoel; but feeling at once it was a foolish speech to this girl, for she turned her large, blue eyes upon him—eyes which he fancied he had never seen before, and which at once gave him a dislike of blue eyes. He could not account for the repellent force that seized him.

"I believe it is; but here we are quite away from the effect of fashion, I hope. I like poor people, so I do not take any credit for going to see them."

"That is not your taste, I think, Miss Kestell?"

Hoel turned from one sister to the other as one would turn away from a corpse to a beautiful woman standing near by.

"No; I don't like dirt and poor people. I am sorry for them; but one can be sorry without hearing all about their

pains and aches." They paused on the bridge. "You do admire this, don't you? Look, the reflections cheat us with a double reality—and that filmy shadow of the filmy silver birches. Keats could have described it; no one else."

"It is the little bit of blue sky reflected in the midst of it which makes it so lovely," said Amice, as if to herself, "an unknown height in an unknown depth."

Elva put her arm in her sister's, and Hoel felt jealous of this mutual sympathy.

"It is Amice who is the true poet, Mr. Fenner; but she persists in hiding all her talents! There is one special thing about poets—I am not sure whether it most makes or mars them—which is, that unhappiness always seems to pursue them even when they are happy; I mean real poets, those who have given us something inspired."

"They can not forget that they are surrounded by themselves, or, perhaps, they do not wish to forget it; but, after all, they only feel much, what, I suppose, we feel a little."

"Keats does not say that," said Amice, suddenly.

> "'And can I bid these joys farewell?
> Yes. I must pass them for a nobler life,
> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts.'"

But Elva's mood changed.

"Let us come in to tea," she said, quickly; "mamma will be expecting us."

At this moment a figure appeared by the Pool; and, without exactly meaning it, the three paused to see who it was. Hoel was close by the gate of Rushwood House, and Elva was by his side. Only Amice had walked a few steps up the drive.

It was Walter Akister who passed; and Hoel at once noticed the deep blush that overspread Elva's face, the dark, surly look on the face of Mr. Akister, and the perfect silence in which his bow was received.

The whole scene took but a minute, and then he was out of sight; but for Hoel it was enough. Elva became at once more precious in his eyes; for there are few men who do not value a woman more if she is coveted by another. For Love is a highly polished diamond with many facets, and in each a different picture may be reflected.

Hoel knew very well that he was falling, nay, had fallen in love. He could even study the phase in all its bearings. He was not deceived in himself; but that was his way, and not the less real because he had the power of arguing over each step of the way he was taking.

He spent a delightful hour in the pretty drawing-room where everything breathed of comfort and refinement; but as Mrs. Kestell found herself well enough to come in and be entertained by him, there was no more private conversation. He walked home in the falling light across the moor, and up to the vicarage, convinced that Elva was worthy of being Mrs. Hoel Fenner. He even acknowledged her superiority over himself in that indescribable original force which attracted him in man or woman, though at the same time he knew that, as far as the outward eye could see, he was infinitely her superior. He felt, too, that he was like a beautiful building raised by skill and patient labor, while she was one of the grottoes which Nature had reared for herself, in order, as it seems, to laugh man's effort to scorn.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

On the whole England is a church-going nation, especially in its rural districts. The beautiful little church which, built by the generosity of a former Eagle Bennison, nestled among its firs, would certainly have been thought to have been built in vain had the squire and his lady not occupied one seat—there were no pews, for Mr. Heaton's church was known for miles round as the High Church—and had not Kestell of Greystone and his daughters been in the seat close behind them, for, to their honor be it said, unless absent from home, these two representative men always did occupy their seats.

The squire had no particular doctrines to uphold; but he liked things, as he said, done "decently and in order." He was usually tired on Sunday, from no mean bodily exertion during the week, so he understood Sunday to mean a day of rest; and no one was ever surprised to see the squire gently nodding through the sermon. The squire himself was too humble to fancy his actions of any impor-

tance, even to the preacher. He knew his wife would keep up the honor of the family.

Mrs. Eagle Bennison always put on a special mood for Sunday; but it depended which Sunday it was.

But Mrs. Eagle Bennison always knew exactly who was at church, and what cottager's wife on the estate had not followed her example of having "no care for the Sunday dinner." If she remembered the culprit during the week, that unfortunate woman would receive a visit; but the squire's wife, having rather a short memory, sometimes went to the wrong Mrs. Smith, and delivered the lecture kindly but firmly, before she discovered her mistake by the remark of the woman:

"Well, ma'am, I'm sorry to seem rude; but I did get to church, though Tom didn't much like my going about on Sunday morning."

"Then it must have been your neighbor, Mrs. Smith. If you were there, you can tell me the text. I always look it out; it's such a help during the week."

"I dare say it is, ma'am; but if you'll excuse me speaking plain, texts don't help you much at the wash-tub. Texts seem to me like the flour before you've rolled in the butter, when you're making pastry, it's best to wait to the end to see if it'll come out agreeable-like; but Mr. Heaton he most in general works 'em in well. Tom and me often says so."

After this Mrs. Eagle Bennison beat a retreat to the other Mrs. Smith.

Miss Heaton devoted herself to the school children, sitting where she could be in easy reach of them, and every five minutes making a dive at the sinner, and returning to her seat with some confiscated property.

Elva had once declared she was sure the children were naughty out of kindness of heart for fear of leaving Miss Heaton unemployed.

All this may sound very unfit occupations to be carried on in a church, especially in one standing, as this did, surrounded by all the works of Nature, which, in their manner, ceaselessly gave thanks; but there was many a man and woman who did listen, and, as far as possible, fulfill the highest part of their being by prayer and praise. Mr. Heaton, himself, was certainly one of these. When he came home it was in vain that Clara questioned him about

those who had attended, his ambiguous answer of, "Oh, I dare say he or she was there," was apt to make his sister say:

"It really is your duty to know who comes to your church, Herbert."

Mr. Kestell neither went to sleep nor found his texts; but he was, as Clara expressed it, "quite a pillar of your church, Herbert."

"Not my church, dear, I hope."

"Well, you know what I mean, Herbert. Mr. Kestell is a great support to our schools. With all her talk, Mrs. Eagle Bennison is very mean; and, if it were not for Mr. Kestell, we should be very badly off."

"Mr. Kestell is very kind and generous; but he is much richer than the squire, and has no landed property."

"You always find excuses for people, Herbert. It's a ridiculous habit."

When Clara was angry with him, Herbert only smiled. It was safer to accept blame which only was meant for himself.

On this special Sunday the small church was quite full. Indeed, Mrs. Eagle Bennison secretly wished both the Mrs. Smiths had stayed at home, as every seat was occupied. Jesse Vicary, who came in a little late, was put into the squire's seat, much against his own will, however.

Hoel Fenner had managed to sit where he could see the Kestells. In London he was not a very constant worshiper; but here, of course, church-going was expected of one, and Hoel, as we know, prided himself on doing what was expected of him; being one of those men who find it real pain to disappoint people if they have formed a good opinion of any one.

But as his eyes traveled toward Elva, they lighted on Jesse Vicary.

"I must speak to him after church," he thought. "How well and handsome he looks; these few days of country life have made another man of him. Curiously enough, he looks here quite like a gentleman. He might be a young country squire, with his strong build and resolute face."

Something else Hoel saw, but did not remark in words to himself; and this was that Jesse Vicary was certainly

attending to the words he was hearing, and not merely watching his neighbors.

"It's born in that class," he thought, after a few moments. "They ought to be grateful to Nature for giving them so much young-world faith."

And so the service went on; and if the angel of record passed down and noted the prayers that were uttered that morning, not many from Hoel Fenner were there of a certainty.

When the people streamed out there were friendly gatherings in the fir avenue that led from the church to the moor. Hoel was only in time to help Elva and her sister into the carriage, and to greet their father.

"I hear you want to see me," said Mr. Kestell, gently. "Come and dine with us, Mr. Fenner, this evening, then we can have plenty of leisurely talk."

"Thank you; if Miss Heaton will spare me."

"Then do come. All right, Turner."

The horses went off. Everybody made way for Mr. Kestell's beautiful horses. Mrs. Eagle Bennison, leaning on her husband's arm, smiled sadly at the two sisters; her smile meant:

"I never take out my horses on Sunday. I can not understand how you can do it."

The look always troubled Amice, who made objections to driving home from church; but it was a standing custom, which Mr. Kestell would not alter. He was always hoping his wife would be well enough to join him. It was for her sake, so there was no hope of altering, and Amice had to resign herself, but it was a weekly trial to her. St. Catherine of Sienna would never have driven to church in a carriage with a pair of horses.

Hoel, seeing he had half an hour before he should have to appear, joined Jesse and his sister. He thought the sister looked nothing particular; but he had just adopted his model for perfection, and certainly Symee in no way resembled Elva Kestell.

"So you got my letter, Vicary, and you agree to my clearing the way," he said, when Symee said she must hurry home, for the blissful time at the farm was over for her.

"I shall be very much obliged if you would do so, sir. Of course, I do not allow that Mr. Kestell has a right to

settle my affairs—I mean no real right, but from courtesy and gratitude I should wish him to approve. I am not sure, however, that he will understand the change, unless you explain that I shall in truth better my position; and as I shall be doing very congenial work, I shall certainly be happier."

"He will easily be made to understand that. Of course, you will have to give due notice."

"A month on either side, sir. But I should not like to leave my employers in any difficulty."

"As to that, a clerk's place is soon caught up. Alas, there are too many waiting; and the world ought to thank you for making room."

"I will come to-morrow and speak to Mr. Kestell myself, of course," said Jesse, decidedly. "He would like me to do that, I am sure; but he has always been so kind that he will make no long opposition—none, indeed, when he sees it will be for my good."

"Of course not."

"And, Heaven helping me, I will do my best in my new position," added Jesse, with a quiet, determined look on his face. "When I have spoken to Mr. Kestell, I will tell my sister that if she will begin in a small way, she may come to me at once. She can help me with copying; and I have an idea that I could have a type-writer, and teach her to use it; she is very clever with her fingers, and is not badly educated for her position."

There was such a ring of hopefulness and joy in Vicary's voice, that Hoel was more than satisfied he had found the right man. He prided himself once more on his discernment.

"Besides, I owe the fellow some thanks for bringing me down here again. It would have been difficult to appear without some excuse," thought Hoel, as he retraced his steps, making up his mind to ramble out alone after lunch to avoid Miss Heaton's searching questions.

He framed Mrs. Hoel Fenner in a gold frame, in which she looked lovely. She was to be much admired by the best and choicest literary society in London that would circle round them. And deep down in his heart there was another motive, powerful, though not specially praiseworthy. If he married Elva Kestell, there would be no need of ever applying to his uncle for a loan; and there

would be no dread of that "if" which had rankled so deeply in his breast. The old man's selfishness would be wasted, and Hoel would be sufficiently revenged. The London Hospital might inherit with pleasure, and much good might it derive from it. Still, let it be clearly understood that Hoel was not thinking of marrying for money; he was quite above such a thought; indeed, he would have preferred to marry a woman who was not an heiress, but as his choice had fallen on one who was rich, all the benefits that would accrue crowded to his brain.

The idea of failure did not much trouble him. True, he remembered her blush when Walter Akister passed by; but he could not imagine a woman really giving herself to such a very unpromising specimen of the human species; at least, not such a woman as Elva.

If some misfortunes cast their shadows before them, is it expecting too much of some events of a more joyful character to cast reflected lights? This Sunday Elva had risen with a strange feeling of light-heartedness about her which surprised herself. If she thought about Hoel, yet it was not with him that she associated her happiness, though she looked forward to seeing him again and hearing him talk. When she did not remember her "Undine" she enjoyed Hoel's conversation, as, indeed, most people did.

Amice, whose moods were never on the surface and were altogether of another and stranger type, was surprised to hear Elva offer to accompany her to the school after lunch. She was accustomed to going her own way alone on these errands of mercy.

The two sisters walked a little way in silence down the hill beyond Rushbrook, where a scattered hamlet necessitated a Sunday class in two rooms of a cottage. Miss Heaton much disliked this class, for here Herbert and Amice met every Sunday; but the young ladies before mentioned not living very near had not volunteered to take the girls, so Amice was allowed to do it by Clara Heaton; but always under protest. Had she guessed that Amice looked upon Herbert as simply a clergyman who would of course never marry, she might have been saved many an anxious hour.

"Amice dear, did not you think papa looked rather worried this morning? I hope that nothing is the matter," said Elva, as they walked along.

"Did he? Perhaps he fancied mamma might not like a visitor this evening."

"Oh, it could not be about Mr. Fenner, he seemed quite eager he should come. Do you like him, Amice?"

"Like him—whom do you mean?"

Elva again felt a little uncomfortable about Amice; now and then these dreamy moods seemed to come over her and she seemed to hear nothing.

"Why, Mr. Hoel Fenner. He even managed to interest mamma yesterday. I wonder what he wants to say about Jesse Vicary."

Amice lifted her dreamy eyes from the ground.

"He has not come only about Jesse Vicary."

"About what else, then?" but, as she spoke, Elva blushed, for Amice fixed her eyes upon her sister's face, and the gaze seemed to explain the mystery. Elva was indignant.

"He is not good enough for you," continued Amice, quietly; "but I saw it plainly yesterday."

Elva stood quite still now, and stamped her foot.

"Amice, you are too ridiculous; and you ought not to carry your—your fancies so far; it is not right. I am sure Mr. Hoel Fenner has come only to see papa."

"Elva, don't look like that, I am so sorry to hurt you, darling. I did not mean it;" she covered her face with her hands. "Yes, I see it again, it is the curse on our family. That idea takes possession of me more and more. There is a curse upon us and all our doings."

They were walking by the side of a fir copse, and some great trunks lay on one side of the road, looking very inviting. Elva sat down and gently drew Amice to her side.

"What do you mean about the curse? Why, that is perfectly ridiculous! Was there ever a family more blessed than we are?"

"You forget what I told you about myself, Elva. Is not that a curse? Do you not consider how hard, how very hard it is to—"

She broke off, for Elva's face was not at all sympathetic; but, on the contrary, it expressed impatience.

"You brood and fancy till I do believe you lose all common sense, Amice; do be sensible, and don't say things which—which make me angry."

"About Mr. Fenner? Well, then, I will say no more,

only you forget, dear, that we have often talked about the future. You will marry some day. You have often told me what your husband was to be like. Oh, love must be a beautiful thing, when it can be pure, and great, and noble; when two people can offer all they have to a service which is above them, and just go on together fighting against evil."

"That is an impossible ideal," said Elva, softly.

"Does it seem so to you? And yet I can see it—only sometimes, though. It seems to me that if two could be found to go hand in hand into those dark alleys and those wicked courts in London, or elsewhere, and if they could go and say that they knew what happiness there was in the true light, even the most miserable and the most degraded would believe two witnesses. Do you think, Elva, it is all an empty vision, and only part of the—curse?"

"Nonsense!" said Elva. "And there is the bell ringing, so you must not stay longer. I shall take a walk on the moors. And please, dear Amice, shake off all your ideas: indeed, it is much better to be like other people." And with this advice, Elva turned back, and plunged into the heather. She felt troubled at what Amice had said, even though she dismissed it from her mind with an impatient gesture.

"I want life and love," she thought. "I wonder if many girls want it as I do. I wish I could do great things; and yet nothing seems to happen to me except—" The wind swept suddenly past; and with a little shudder Elva shook off the disagreeable idea. "I won't think of Mr. Akister. I never, never could love him. I can't think how he dared to—fancy I ever could. I believe in happiness, even though Amice will not. She fancies God calls people to accept misery. No, no, that can not be."

Still fighting her way through the thick heather, and fighting inwardly the idea that in any way human beings are called to be miserable, Elva reached the foot of the Beacon, and, scrambling up a long bank, she sat down under the shadow of a Scotch fir-tree. In a few moments the beauty of the scenery, the sweet scent of the heather, the hum of a bumble-bee, seeking out the largest flower, all the sights and sounds gradually numbed her senses. She was inhaling a narcotic. Nature seemed to be taking the eager child in her arms, and lulling her into a softer

and more peaceful mood. The birds and the insect life seemed to sing the same song of happiness, and to repeat that life is made for joy, and that the creed of suffering is false; that Amice, with her wild idea of curses and of expiation, was mistaken, and that—

How was it? Surely she was acting the same scene again. She had been here before; she had gone over the struggle, and, yes—

"Miss Kestell, this is an unexpected pleasure."

Elva's sudden fear was calmed; it was not Walter Akister's voice she heard, or his strange, fierce looks she looked up to behold, but—Hoel Fenner.

"Can you wonder that one gets to love this place?" answered Elva, not surprised that Hoel sat down beside her as if this was his right place.

"No, indeed, I do not; I have been watching you for a few moments," he said, slowly, "and I saw that you alone, in all this spot perhaps, really appreciate what you see."

Hoel was struggling with his own eagerness to speak to Elva, somehow or other to make her understand that she attracted him above all other women; but she was so perfectly natural, that it was a harder task than he expected. There was not the least consciousness of his admiration in her face; the deep gray eyes looked upon the beauty of nature, not on his own perfections. Hoel did not know that this morning Elva would have looked straight into his face. It was Amice's words that kept her eyes averted, even though she did not believe them.

"I came out here to wait for Mr. Heaton. He said he might join me if he were not detained, and I believe he is teaching some brats now. I wonder how much good all that sort of thing does? I don't mean any disrespect to Herbert Heaton or his cloth; but, in the long run, isn't a clergyman's life rather a wasted labor? Good people are sometimes so very disagreeable."

Elva might have agreed with him a little while ago; now she was seized with the spirit of contradiction.

"How can doing things for people we love be waste of time?"

"Love is a wide term when used by the clergy, for instance. Most of them will work for duty, and duty is a desire to get a good deal of percentage for your money. Disinterestedness is difficult to find."

"Oh, no, no," said Elva, "that can not be so. I know my sister is perfectly disinterested. I don't think the idea of reward ever enters her head."

Elva forgot all about Amice's stray words now in defending her, and looked straight and fearlessly at Hoel.

"You are a true friend, Miss Kestell," he said, in an altered tone. "The first time I saw you I was struck by your being entirely different from every other woman I have met. You must give me leave to ask you—to tell you something here out on this heather bank; may I?"

There was no answer. Elva blushed deeply. After all, was Amice right? But how different this was from Walter's speech. The deep courtesy of the tone was very flattering, coming as it did from such a man.

"Will you give me leave?" he repeated, and there was something quite new in his tone—a boyish sort of pleading which she had never heard or noticed before.

"I don't understand what you mean," said Elva, quite afraid that she was weaving a wrong meaning into his words because of Amice's silly speech.

"Yes, I see you don't. I have no right to expect that you should understand me; but I do ask you to believe me. Will you?"

"Yes, of course," said Elva, recovering her breath. "Why should I doubt you?"

"Because you have known me so short a time, and because you may not believe that there is very deep, earnest truth in what I am saying. You remember that dinner-party? I am afraid I unwittingly offended you that evening, and yet I assure you I meant to do the contrary. I thought then that you were the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, and then I knew that my fate had brought me here, and that you were the only woman I ever wished to—to— Miss Kestell, tell me if I may go on. My life will be dead forever if you tell me that I am annoying you. Shall I go on?"

Elva was slowly picking a piece of quaking-grass to pieces, bit by bit.

"Yes," she said; feeling as if she were another Elva, or not herself.

"I met you here on this moor the next day, you remember. Some second sights disenchant us. I was not disenchanted. I admired you a thousand times more. You

seemed to me like a breath of this life-giving air, and yet a woman whom any man, all the rest of his life, might be proud to have loved. But when we parted I saw you throw away my gift of flowers. I knew then that I must, indeed, have been personally disagreeable to you. You do not deny it. Why should you? I saw that you had no wish to see more of me, and yet—don't despise me because I am making my confession, Miss Kestell—and yet I was even more attracted. I went home and tried to think it was all a happy autumn dream—a delusion that would fade. On the contrary; the more I tried to forget you the more your presence took possession of me. In short, I am here again, and this time there shall be no deception. I would much rather know that nothing can overcome your prejudice, your dislike, that make myself still more obnoxious to you. But last evening, you did not repel me. I can not tell how thankful I am to meet you, because, if I hear my sentence from your lips, no one need know, no one need ever hear that—"

"It is all so strange," said Elva, "what can I say?"

"Do not decide," said Hoel, very tenderly; he was touched by her distress. "I only want to let you judge whether some day you will care to keep a bunch of gentians, if I am here to give them to you?"

This was a very delicate way of making an offer, and Elva felt grateful. There was none of that fierce passion about him that there had been about Walter Akister; the very difference attracted her, for the other had repelled her. The relief of finding Mr. Fenner was not going to make her say yes or no on the spot was so great that Elva smiled.

"I expect, Mr. Fenner, that you have made a mistake," she said, suddenly; and the eyes that looked at him were so bright, that Hoel was more and more certain he had made none. "If you will walk round by the copse, I will make a confession, and then, after that, I am sure you will change your mind."

"A confession?"

"Yes, one that will alter the opinion you have of me. Indeed, you do not know me any more than—"

"Than you can know me. But I want your leave to teach you that I, at all events, do not make up my mind unless I am quite sure—"

Elva laughed now. She was young, and had the world before her. She was loved, and that was very sweet, even though she was not sure of loving, and had a confession to make.

"You once said very, very unkind things of me."

"I? Never."

"Yes, you did; and the truth is, I have never forgiven you. You see that I have so much to unlearn."

"What do you mean?"

Hoel was not much given to humor, and he resented Elva's smile; for humor ought never to touch us personally if it is to be acceptable.

"I do not want to tell you, and yet I feel I ought to. How can any one love without perfect confidence? There, I will tell you, I wrote 'An Undine of To-day.'"

Elva paused on the sandy path and faced her detractor.

"You were Isidore Kent?"

Poor Hoel remembered clearly all the things he had said.

"Yes; now you see how differently you will think of me."

"But I care only about Elva Kestell," he said, just a little angry that the two were the same. Hoel had no wish to marry an authoress; he had a very decided objection to women writers unless they were of the first water; and then only at a distance from him.

"And you quite despise Isidore Kent. I knew you would."

"You will never write another novel," he said, in a low voice, not daring to take her hand, because of that perfect absence of all consciousness in her at this moment.

"Why?"

"Because, if you would give me leave, I shall make you the happiest woman in the world; and the happiest women do not write."

They had reached the place where their roads parted. Elva paused.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand. "I would rather go home alone."

"May I ask your father this evening whether I may come to Rushbrook till—I know my fate?"

"Till I know my mind," she said, with a brilliant smile. Then earnestly, in quite another mood, she added, passionately: "I want life to be beautiful. I want to have room

in the world; will love give it to me? Amice believes in nothing but self-denial; but I am not good like Amice."

"Thank Heaven!" said Hoel to himself; aloud, he said: "Give me leave to try, and I will make you understand that love can give you everything."

"And if I disappoint you?"

"Then you will be my most loved memory," he said, earnestly.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN AFTER-DINNER TALK.

THE dinner passed off very cheerfully. Hoel made himself charming, as he well knew how to do; Elva was a little quiet, but made an excellent hostess, and Mr. Kestell appeared to great advantage. He was so courtly, so gracious, his stories were always to the point and well told, that Hoel wondered how it was that he had not before noticed what a very superior man Mr. Kestell was, intellectually and socially. It was only Amice who did not contribute to the entertainment, for she was more silent than usual, though now and then Hoel found her eyes fixed on him, as if desirous to see through him. The look seemed to disconcert him; he even settled in his own mind that Elva's sister must be a little peculiar; but though on the surface all was progressing well with Hoel, he was decidedly rather nervous as to the interview he should have with Mr. Kestell. Evidently Elva had said nothing, for she tried to appear perfectly unconscious, and he was forced to make believe also.

Now that he was fairly embarked, Hoel rather doubted whether he had acted fairly by first speaking to Elva; for, after all, when compared with Mr. Kestell's daughter, he was not by any means in a position to offer great inducement, in the way of money, to Mr. Kestell. Of course, there was the "expectation;" but, as we know, Hoel hated this, and would have preferred not mentioning it.

If he talked, laughed, and told good stories during dinner-time, it was by some happy mechanical process, which long use helped to carry him through; only when he was left alone with Mr. Kestell did the real Hoel feel that he was himself again; also, looking up with a determination to take his courage in his two hands, he noticed that his

host suddenly became silent, and for a few moments seemed to forget Hoel was present, as he attentively examined the wine in his glass. The port was certainly irreproachable, and a queer fancy came into Hoel's mind that Mr. Kestell was superstitious, and was consulting the signs in the deep color of the liquid. This strange silence and forgetfulness of his companion prevented Hoel from opening his mouth, and he waited till suddenly Mr. Kestell seemed to return from the clouds and be once more himself.

"You came—I mean, you wished to speak to me, I understand, Mr. Fenner, about Vicary. It is strange you should have made his acquaintance; but I am sure it will be of great benefit to the poor fellow."

Hoel felt he could not talk freely about Vicary till he had made a clean breast of his own affairs; as well have it over at once.

"I certainly did want to talk to you about a little matter of business referring to Jesse Vicary; but I had better be honest and open with you, Mr. Kestell. I believe my chief wish to revisit Rushbrook was to find out—"

Mr. Kestell once more held the glass of port up to the lamp-light, and Hoel noticed that the thin white fingers shook a little.

"Yes?" he put in, for Hoel paused—"to find out?"

"To find out if I had the least chance of success—I—I—mean whether you, sir, would ever entertain the idea of me as a suitor for your daughter's hand. I may as well say at once that my position in London is by no means a bad one. Without vanity, I can say that my name is well known, and that I am making a respectable income with literary work, also I have a fixed income as sub-editor of 'The Current Reader;' and, besides this, I possess three hundred a year of my own. But, of course, when all is said, I know I have not enough money to make my suit in any way—"

Poor Hoel! He had never before felt so small and insignificant. The riches of Kestell of Greystone oppressed him. He made another noble effort, however.

"Still, sir, my motive being, I assure you, one purely of personal love and admiration for your daughter, I only ask to be allowed to try my fate. As for money, I do not want any. I could keep my wife in an honorable position, and,

if not rich, yet the society into which I should introduce her is of the best."

"In short, you are in love with Elva," said Mr. Kestell, slowly bringing down his glass and smiling so kindly that Hoel was captivated.

"Yes, sir, that is the long and short of it."

"Have you mentioned the subject to her?"

"This morning I tried to find out if I was not altogether distasteful to her, and she has given me leave to speak to you. Indeed, sir, if I might only have a chance, I could at least prove how deep was the feeling which prompted me to try, even though with so little hope of success, and yet—"

Hoel lifted his handsome face, in which so many good feelings were painted, and at this moment he was nearer being a great character than ever before.

Mr. Kestell rose from his seat, and walked a few paces with his head bent down and his arms behind him. It was a moment of intense anxiety for Hoel, whose pride could seldom brook long suspense. He imagined the courteous refusal of the rich man and his own shy pride. Then he tried to frame his answer. In fact, in those few moments he lived through a sharp experience of doubt.

Mr. Kestell paused suddenly, and Hoel, who had risen respectfully, was surprised at the gentle voice in which the old man said:

"Draw your chair near the fire, and let us talk this matter over, Mr. Fenner. We have seen but little of each other; but I have heard much about you. Never mind how. Everything I have heard is in your favor; and if you can win Elva's love I know my child will become the wife of an English gentleman. As to her, I must leave her free. Perhaps I am too partial; but it seems to me that the man who wins her will win a true, generous heart, and a girl who will be an honor to any home. Where she loves she trusts implicitly; but I hope—that is, perhaps, my most earnest wish—that my dear child may never be disappointed or deceived by the man she loves."

Hoel was much touched, and even more surprised, at the kindness shown to him; moreover, his vanity was—human nature being easily influenced—in spite of himself, a good deal called forth by hearing, unexpectedly, that Mr. Kestell had made private inquiries as to his character, and that

the result had been eminently to his advantage. Few men could have heard such praise without having their own good opinion of themselves slightly enhanced. The confirmation of his own unexpressed opinion was most gratifying.

"But, Mr. Kestell, much as I feel your extreme kindness, I must not let you overlook the fact of—my very inadequate means?"

Mr. Kestell waved his hand very slightly.

"I do not undervalue money, Mr. Fenner; but experience has shown me, or rather shows every human being, that we can not make the happiness of those we love best by money only. There may, even, be much advantage in poverty; but I do not wish my daughters to be married for their fortune. On their marriage I shall meet the fortune of their husbands with an equal amount—nothing more. When I die I shall leave everything to my wife for her life; then no one will accuse me of having in any way made my children the objects of envy or temptation to the avaricious. At my wife's death everything will be divided equally between my two daughters, save for a few legacies. You see, I am perfectly open with you."

Hoel seized Mr. Kestell's hand, and wrung it warmly.

"You have taken a weight off my mind, sir. I was afraid of being looked upon as a fortune-hunter. Your words have shown me that you did not think this, or you would not have spoken as you did."

Mr. Kestell smiled.

"Then your mind is at rest, and you may try your luck with an easy conscience. In these days parents do not have much control over their children. I do not complain. I wish them to be quite unfettered; but I do wish you success, Mr. Fenner, with all my heart."

"Then I shall succeed," said Hoel, feeling almost annoyed that he had passed through such unnecessary anxiety.

"And if you succeed, I venture to predict that you and Elva will not have to suffer more than is good for young people from limited means. I was told about your uncle, Mr. Mellish Fenner's intentions."

"I never even give my uncle's fortune a thought, sir," said Hoel, grandly. "He is very peculiar in many ways. He may even marry. Anyhow, I am not the man to sigh after or count upon dead men's shoes. I would rather

begin married life in furnished lodgings than borrow on expectations."

"Whatever happens," answered Mr. Kestell, after a pause, "you will believe I did the best I could for you, I hope. Elva must learn to know you. I doubt if, with her, there is such a thing as love at first sight. Yet, much as I have studied her, I never can quite know how she will act. Perhaps my girls have been allowed to go their own way too much; but my dear wife has never been strong, and she has always been my first thought. Her daughters have learned that they must give in to her wishes. I did require that of them; nothing else—nothing else."

The affection which Hoel had never felt for his uncle since the "if" had been uttered, seemed to spring up in his heart for Elva's father.

"And I am sure, sir, that is why Miss Kestell feels your love doubly. I have never known a father, but if—if I have the happiness of becoming one of your family, may I say at once that you will never find me wanting in love and respect."

"Thank you," said Mr. Kestell, in a low and much-moved voice. "I can not tell you how deeply I feel your words. Go on and prosper. But now, before going into the drawing-room, let me hear what you wish to say about Jesse Vicary."

Hoel was at once himself again, feeling decidedly small at suddenly remembering that Vicary and his affairs had entirely gone out of his head during the previous conversation, and that had Mr. Kestell not referred to the subject himself, he—Hoel—might have gone into the drawing-room without a thought of the man whom he meant to raise from his unworthy surroundings. He hid his forgetfulness as best he could, though to the practiced eye of Mr. Kestell it was visible enough.

"Exactly so. I forget if you know how I became acquainted with this young Vicary. He came to our office hoping to get a little work. We get so many similar applications, that you can imagine we have one answer always ready. Vicary received it; but, as I happened to interview him that day, something in the man himself struck me as remarkable. I can hardly define what it is. He is clever, certainly; but not cleverer than many literary aspirants we see often; and yet there is something about him

which at once marks him out from the ordinary clever young man who wishes to rise. He is an excellent fellow into the bargain; rather given to preaching, I fancy, if one knew the ins and outs of his leisure moments. But all this—what shall I call it?—this too palpable earnestness, is merely on the surface; at the bottom he is very superior in every way. In short, feeling drawn to him, I procured him a little work, which he brought to us so extremely well done, and so full of originality of treatment, that our editor, Mr. Carpell, of his own accord, suggested to me to try him in our office. We have to employ several writers whose duties are rather varied, and who must be a good deal more than men-machines. Vicary will suit us excellently; and if he proves that his powers are beyond this post, we can advance him; if not, even this position which I am at liberty to offer him will be far more congenial to him than the one he now fills."

"The one I found for him, you mean?"

"Yes, he has been perfectly honest and straightforward with me. He told me the outline of his life, and all you have done for him and his sister; and he was glad that I should first mention this subject to you, though he considers that you can not now care how he earns his living, as long as he in no way disappoints you. I suppose he has really risen by his own good conduct, though without you he would never have had the chance."

Hoel paused, thinking that he had put the state of the case excellently well. He was not prepared for the result.

"I appreciate your kindness, Fenner; indeed, it only serves to raise my opinion of you. But in this case I think I am the best judge. Believe an old man, and desist from trying to draw Vicary away from his present employment which my interest procured for him. I have seen many men, and I know the world pretty well at my age; and I can assure you that you will only do Vicary an injury by suggesting this move to him; you will unsettle him, and in the future he will look back with regret when he recognizes that this step was his ruin."

Hoel was entirely surprised; but he at once felt that Mr. Kestell must be mistaken, and did not really understand the nature of the offer.

"I assure you, I am only offering Vicary a much better position than he leaves; even if we did not require his serv-

ices in the future, which is most unlikely, for we are very careful whom we choose, and our workers seldom leave us, yet the very fact of his having worked in our office would assure him a good post elsewhere. Where he is now he may stay till he dies, and unless he works very hard at supplementary jobs, he can not hope to achieve even a small success."

"But it is certain; and you literary men, accustomed to a kind of lottery life, hardly understand enough the great superiority of certain work over uncertain."

"But this is very certain work, sir," said Hoel; and then, suddenly remembering it was hardly his place to argue with his possible father-in-law, he paused.

"I may be mistaken, of course. We old people are sometimes prejudiced; if so, forgive me, Fenner. In any case, I can not feel that I am justified in giving my consent. Now shall we go into the drawing-room? You may tell Elva all I said, but do not let my words bind her in any way."

Hoel rose; but before they reached the door, he made one more effort, if, perhaps, a feeble one, in the interest of Vicary.

"Then you will not recommend Jesse Vicary to accept our offer?"

"No, I shall not recommend it. I shall, in fact, refuse my consent."

Then Mr. Kestell opened the drawing-room door, and Hoel saw Elva standing near the window, looking like a beautiful embodiment of life, and Vicary and his affairs faded from his mind.

CHAPTER XV.

JESSE'S BENEFACTOR.

"DEAR VICARY,—I have had a talk with Mr. Kestell about the offer we made you. I am afraid he does not look very favorably upon it; but you will, of course, come and talk to him about it. I shall, in all probability, be coming to stay at Rushbrook House next Saturday, so we can discuss it again; and I hope I shall then get your final answer. We can quite well wait till then. I am off the first thing

to-morrow, so Miss Heaton has promised to let you have this some time in the morning.

"Yours, truly, HOEL FENNER."

Jesse Vicary was lying out upon the moors reading this note which a lad from the rectory had given him, glad not to have to walk the extra mile on to the farm, but to spend the time in pastime of his own choosing.

Jesse had been very busy thinking of the future as he lay there, and the note had not made thinking less necessary; and yet, in spite of it, he was conscious of intense happiness because of the warmth and of the beauty of his beloved moors.

Who would not have felt happy in this spot? Noonday had come upon the great moor with its yellow paths and its delicious scented heather and gorse? Jesse could have accurately told you the time, and so, for the matter of that, could any person of average intellect, for the grazing cattle hardly threw a shadow upon the green grass in the upland meadows, while everything was bathed in a faint haze of heat. All at once the perfect peace was broken by the jarring scream of a pheasant in a neighboring copse, and a few cocks crew from one of the squatter cottages on the moor; but these sounds almost seemed to enhance the eloquent silence of Nature. Jesse's eyes, which had been fixed on the distance, slowly traveled nearer home. Just in front of him rose a clump of withered black gorse stalks, and near to it was a solitary stunted bracken, whose yellow fronds slightly quivered when the light wind swept slowly round the hill-side.

"There are solitary beings in nature," mused Jesse. He was in a very contemplative mood; a mood which is the perfection of laziness of body and activity of thought. "That withered bracken stalk, how did it get here, and that dead gorse? They look as if they meant to protest against the abundant perkiness of their fellow-creatures. I suppose there is a certain pleasure in protesting, but one is apt to get conceited over it. When Mr. Fenner suggested my leaving my present quarters, I expect I felt as that bracken feels, or ought to feel. Mr. Fenner has been very kind; I thought he could not quite so easily win over Mr. Kestell. I suppose it is hard to give up one's own way or one's own prejudices. He would prefer my staying where

I am; but why? I do not ask him for anything. No, there are times when a man's gratitude may interfere with the higher powers God gives him to cultivate. I owe him much, but not that. I will accept this opening. Symee must have a home, and she shall. If I might go out into the big world, to Australia, or somewhere, where men make money, I know I could succeed; but then Symee would have no home; and yet I—I might grow rich, and come back with something to offer to a woman. But no—all these are visions; but, anyhow, this offer is fact, and Mr. Kestell can not prevent my accepting it."

Then Jesse fell into a deeper dream. This time it was wordless; the vision that floated before him shaped itself into a good and beautiful woman; and though Dante could give words to his passionate homage, there have been many who, though dumb and tongue-tied, have yet rendered the same worship at a woman's pure shrine.

He did not now worry himself about this happy time of idleness. He knew it was good for him, and that he would be able to work with more courage from being able now to drink to the full the cup of nectar which Nature presents to those who will stop and slake their thirst. As he lay there, his fingers touched even the withered bents of grass with reverence, and his eyes, wandering slowly from foot to summit of those very tall fir-trees in the near foreground, noted a hundred particulars which true lovers only see.

Hoel Fenner, with all his literary polish, his exquisite taste, his keen sense of fitness, might have sat here and seen nothing of Nature's true beauty, and would have derived no other piece of wisdom from what he saw further than to assure the next person he spoke to that Rushbrook was a very pretty neighborhood.

But Nature, who can do so much for her worshipers, has also a limited power. She insists on having an unruffled surface to mirror herself on when she herself is unruffled, and expects passion in other hearts when she herself is rocked by tempests. Do not expect her sympathy, for between her and human hearts there is a great gulf fixed.

Jesse found out this to-day, for he knew he must at last bestir himself. Nature would do no more for him than give him hope. He knew that he must have an interview with Mr. Kestell, and that Symee would be looking out for

him; so he started up, stretched himself with blissful contentment, and then went down the moor toward St. John's Church, on his way to Rushbrook House.

Here he suddenly encountered George Guthrie, who could often be found apparently wandering with no object; but those who saw this did not understand George Guthrie. He made a dart at Vicary, and greeted him warmly.

"Just the man I wanted to see. How are you? Enjoying all this sunshine. I've escaped from my cousin, because she has a meeting of good ladies to-day, and when they entered the hall some of them looked at me as if I were the old gentleman himself. I asked what the meeting was about, and my cousin looked upward and showed the whites of her eyes and said: 'T. A. P. S.' 'Taps?' I said. 'No,' she said, 'Training of the Adult Poor Society.' Good heavens! Vicary, fancy how I trembled as more Taps flowed in! I felt I was a poor adult, and I didn't know what might happen to me. They each carried a bag, and were shown into the dining-room and sat solemnly round the table on high-backed chairs. I looked in through the window, because the whole thing seemed so mysterious to me. My cousin says it is a protest against Socialism. Now I fancy if they asked you to come and speak to them, you could tell them a little about the poor adults. Eh, Vicary? But it amuses the ladies, you know. I hear they are very sad because Miss Amice Kestell won't join them. They shook their heads off nearly, and declared she had Red Ideas. But all this is by the way. I want to know how little 'Liza is getting on. Her old grandmother was talking to me about her only yesterday. I said that I would tell you to call, if you would be so kind."

"Indeed, I will," said Jesse, smiling, for it was impossible not to smile at Mr. Gutbrie's remarks.

"'Liza speaks of you as if you were the Juggernaut before whom she ought to throw herself down. By the way, an interesting fact turned up during our conversation. Old Mrs. Joyce says she remembers your grandmother coming to her when she, old Mrs. Vicary, first moved on to the Beacon. It was to borrow soap, I think; but the very fact seemed to raise her into another sphere. 'Mr. Vicary is a very fine gentleman now,' she said, 'but his grandmother once came, etc.' She doesn't think half so

much of me because she says, 'you weren't from these parts, sir, and one can not ever be sure of them as are stranger-born, though you're better than most.' Good gracious, Vicary, fancy any one trying to train the adult poor; where will they end? I should like to see my cousin in a cottage for a week. I shall set up a society of Taps; put rich instead of poor, and get the poor to form the committee."

"My sister tells me that Miss Amice does a great work among the squatters in the forest," said Jesse.

"Well, yes, they look upon her as a being from another world; and, to say the truth, so do I. Here, Vicary, this way, please; I see Miss Heaton returning from Court Garden, so the Taps are over. Miss Heaton thinks the poor ought to be kept in their places, and says I am too free with them. Now I think I can slink home up by the Pools; by dinner-time my cousin will have forgotten the Taps, and I shall be able to look her in the face again. Good-bye, and don't forget to go and see 'Liza's grandmother, and don't make out that she's overworked, because they would send for her at once home. Between you, me, and the door-post, the adult poor do want training nearly as much as the rich; their feelings are so tender. They are all heart or none."

As Jesse proceeded toward Rushbrook House, Mr. Guthrie's words made him think of his own early history. He would certainly go and see Mrs. Joyce, for now that he was a man, the subject interested him; before, he had never cared much to know more than the bare fact that his mother had died at his birth, and his grandmother soon afterward; that they had come from beyond the great ridge of forest which seemed to him, when a boy, to be the boundary of the world; and that only two months before his birth had the old grandmother and her daughter moved to a house on the Beacon. Positively, this was all he knew. He had never even before now heard his grandmother talked of by name, for 'Liza's grandmother had been living many years away from Rushbrook, and had only lately come back to her son's cottage. Perhaps only lately had Jesse fully grown into the feeling of love of his own order; only lately had he fully realized that, however much he himself might rise, yet his heart was now touched by the true feeling of humanity which, if it is not stifled in the

presence of the rich, yet only grows to its full perfection among the poor. Symee, he knew, had no such sympathies, and he did not blame her. He had won his own freedom by work, and could enjoy it in any direction he liked; she was still timidly groping after that sense of freedom which is not really free, but fettered by custom.

Jesse had won his victory by days and nights of work; a work which could not be represented by any visible result, for it was spiritual labor in a spiritual kingdom.

This was the state of his mind when he reached the house, where his thoughts would center, he knew, now for many a year. He was conscious that he looked about him, hoping to see Amice Kestell; and he was conscious of disappointment when no one appeared; but in another moment Symee was with him in the avenue, and then his great brotherly love was all with her.

Symee's soft, gentle face was decidedly troubled, and as she clasped his arm after the first greeting, he knew something was the matter with her.

"You are late, Jesse dear. I have been looking out for you for some time. Mr. Kestell is in this afternoon, and wants to see you in ten minutes; and then I have got leave to walk with you till six o'clock."

"That's right. But what's the matter, child?"

He often called her child because, compared with him, Symee was so young and weak, even though they were twins.

"Don't let's talk about it now. Tell me, how have you enjoyed your walk?"

"It seems to give me courage in every pore. I only wish— But I'll keep all that till I've spoken to Mr. Kestell."

"Mr. Hoel Fenner was here on Sunday, and I heard Miss Elva say he was coming again. You may fancy how I looked at him, Jesse—because he had been so good to you."

"Yes, he has been very kind, and I hope we may see more of each other."

"Miss Elva was so strange and thoughtful when he had been, I can't help fancying—"

Jesse suddenly had the same idea, but would not allow his sister to say it; he was naturally unwilling to hear the secrets of others.

"That's not our business, is it, Symee? Now tell me

how you are. What makes you pale?—and you look as if you had been crying."

"I had one of my bad headaches yesterday, and Miss Amice was away, so I couldn't ask her to cure it. Fancy, Jesse, she actually stayed up all night in a dirty cottage, with some old woman who is very ill!"

Jesse's heart gave a leap. He had often heard before of Amice's kind actions; but only now did they seem to affect him personally.

"Why do you speak as if it was very dreadful, Symee? You would do as much."

Symee shook her head.

"No; I don't like dirt and poor people. I know it's horrid of me, Jesse, and I would do anything to please you, you know; but everybody can't like the same thing. Miss Elva can't bear poor people either."

Jesse was penitent at once. He often had to pull himself up for harsh judgment.

"Well, Symee, I promise you a very, very clean little home, even if we have to do with few luxuries. You don't mind work, I know."

Symee blushed and hesitated, then finally added:

"It's time now, Jesse, for you to go and see Mr. Kestell; and, dear Jesse, don't be rash."

"Rash?—of course not. I'm not given to being rash, you silly child. By the way, Symee, if ever Miss Amice wants anything done for her in London, you must say I would be only too glad to go anywhere for her. I don't mean shopping," he added, laughing; "but if she wants things for her poor people, or—"

"I'll tell her; but now, Jesse, do go, and I'll be quite ready by the bridge when you come out."

Jesse tried not to feel annoyed by Symee's manner. Much as he loved her, sometimes her want of strength jarred against him; but the feeling was only momentary, as he said to himself, "I have enough given me for both. I believe it is the evil effect of having always to obey. There is nothing like being one's own master to teach one firmness. But she will soon learn when we live together."

The afternoon had slightly clouded over; the great brilliancy was gone; for what looked like thunder-clouds were rising from a long, straight bank above the horizon. Pile upon pile of hard round masses unfolded themselves with a

majestic sweep which foreboded a storm. "But not just at present," thought Jesse, as the butler opened the door of Mr. Kestell's study and announced:

"Mr. Jesse Vicary."

Mr. Kestell was seated at his writing-table, and rose at once to greet him. So doing, his back was turned to the light, while Jesse stood in full view. The wavy chestnut hair, the frank, yet rather thoughtful eyes, the firm mouth —firm, though gentle—and the well-built, strong figure of the young fellow contrasted in every respect with that of his benefactor.

"Good-afternoon, Jesse," said Mr. Kestell. "I am glad you have come; I was expecting you. Sit down and —I think you will soon hear reason."

Jesse sat down; but even this action seemed almost done under protest. He felt this was an important moment of his life, and he tried to prepare himself for meeting it. He would have preferred standing up and saying his say out boldly and firmly; but custom and courtesy often prevent spontaneous speech and action.

"I suppose you mean, sir—that is, I think you refer to Mr. Hoel Fenner's offer. I received a note from him at noon. He wrote it last night."

"After seeing me, I suppose. He spoke very kindly about you. I was, in fact, much gratified by his opinion of you; and he made an offer which I know many an inexperienced young man would have accepted without consideration. But happily, Vicary, you have an older head to think for you. I proved to Mr. Fenner, I think, that it would be most imprudent to throw yourself out of your present position on the chance of future—fame, which, as one knows if one has lived as long as I have, is often a will-o'-the-wisp. I am not at all surprised, Vicary, at your being taken with the idea; but I have enough confidence in you to believe that you will not give in to this desire for change."

"It is no desire for change," said Jesse, very slowly. "I have long wished for this sort of work, and I have spent many hours in trying to qualify myself for some such employment."

"That is what all young men think. My dear Vicary, be advised, do not throw away certainty; do not oblige me to think less well of you."

Mr. Kestell's tone had not altered in the least; if he were pleading with Jesse, it was certainly not in the heat of the moment, for his words seemed very carefully chosen and weighed. Jesse, on the contrary, having previously made up his mind to be perfectly calm, was fast losing this state of feeling; he pushed his chair back and stood up, without being aware of his change of position, so much was his mind excited.

"Indeed, indeed, Mr. Kestell, you do not understand," he said, with deep earnestness. "I do value your good opinion, perhaps more than anything else; at all events, more than the opinion of any one else. Have I not given you proofs of it again and again? You have done much, very much for me and Symee, and I am deeply grateful; but now I am a man, I have fought out many a battle alone, and at such times I have had no one to look to but myself and God. I don't wish to boast, but only to say that such things make one able to stand alone. I knew that from the time I first went to school I have had to look my position in the face. You saved me from a terrible fate, the fate of a work-house boy, and to my dying day I shall remember this. And it was even more that you did for Symee. Thank God, she is now fit to stand alone; and here she has learned nothing but good. Such things as these can not be forgotten by any man who has a heart or a spark of gratitude in his nature; but yet, in spite of all this, Mr. Kestell, I feel that I am not any longer responsible to man for my actions, but to God. He has most unexpectedly opened this path for me; if there are objections —and every position has its objections—yet I will overcome them. You forget that it has also many advantages, and that if I refuse this offer, I may never in all my life get such another. If it were only for my own ambition, then, perhaps, I should believe I was mistaken; but it is for Symee's sake. Good as you have been to her, yet she deserves a home of her own, and if I can procure it for her, she shall have it."

"Symee will never wish to ruin your prospects; I believe she has too much good sense for that."

Mr. Kestell's voice was losing its gentleness; there was a slight increase of warmth in it, as if for a moment he was off his guard.

"Symee will certainly believe in my love for her. She will not oppose my wishes," said Jesse, firmly. He saw that nothing would now turn Mr. Kestell, and that the whole responsibility of the change must be taken on his own shoulders. Jesse was prepared to do this.

For a moment the old man was silent. He took up a paper-cutter and put it down again sharply. At last he, too, rose from his chair.

"Jesse, whatever rash thing you may choose to do, I can not allow your sister to ruin her prospects. If you wish to retain my—my good opinion, you must stay where you are now, otherwise you must take the consequences for yourself. I shall also insist on Symee having fair notice and perfect freedom of action, and I have not the least doubt that she will see the foolishness of your proposed change."

"You can not part us against our will, sir," said Jesse, slowly, while the hot blood mounted to his cheeks. "If I accept this post, I shall ask Symee to come and live with me, and she will come."

"I think I can judge for her, and I trust Symee will be guided by wise counsels."

"Thank you, sir, for what you have done for her; but I am her brother, her only relation, and I shall study her happiness, even if she is too gentle and too much influenced to choose for herself."

It was now Mr. Kestell's turn to be annoyed.

"Then I can but say my last word, Vicary. I entirely disapprove of your conduct, and I refuse my consent to your giving up your present position, or to luring away your sister from a safe home. If you insist, I shall wash my hands of both of you, and I think the world will judge between us; but I hope you will not in the future talk any nonsense about gratitude."

Never had Jesse seen his benefactor look as he now did, or heard him speak in such a stern manner. His face had changed—a deadly pallor overspread his features, his hands shook visibly.

"Is that your last word?" said Jesse, going toward the door, his whole spirit rebelling against the injustice of the man whom he had looked upon as nearly perfect.

"Yes; but—" a sudden change took place in Mr. Kestell's manner, and he held out his hand.

"Come, Vicary, don't go away in anger; think better of this, and leave well alone."

Jesse did not see the outstretched hand, so entirely absorbed was he in the question at issue.

"I can not, sir; in this case I must judge for myself, and I deny to any man the right of judging for me."

"You refuse to be guided?"

"I do; I shall accept the offer."

"For yourself, perhaps; but Symee will remain here."

"Not of her own free choice."

"Yes, of her own free choice."

Jesse had reached the door; his anger, that had been for one moment modified, rose again.

"I must ask her myself, sir, and this question shall be decided between us. I can allow no third person to come in."

"I leave you both free, perfectly free; but remember, if once you take your sister away, from that day my doors are closed against you both. I will not speak of ingratitude; your own consciences are best able to judge your conduct."

Perhaps there is no accusation which an honest man finds more galling to bear than that of ingratitude. It acted so powerfully with Jesse that, without another word, he left the room, mechanically crossed the hall, and only woke up to the consciousness of where he was when he saw his sister waiting for him on the bridge. Her face was very pale, and she showed plainly that she was well aware of the drift of the conversation Jesse had been having. One look at his strangely moved countenance revealed much more to her, and when he said:

"Come, Symee, don't let us discuss anything yet; let us get into a quiet place where no one will see us," she took his arm and followed in silence.

It spoke volumes for Jesse's self-control that he imposed on himself this waiting time, for fear of saying something he would regret.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOT QUITE CLEAR.

How long they walked in silence, neither of them reckoned. Symee could hardly keep up with her brother's strides, and as he was making his way straight up across

country toward the Beacon, she was at last forced to pause.

"Jesse," she said, for she was walking behind him, "wait a moment. I can not walk as quickly as you do."

The very appeal to his strength conquered the fierce spirit within that was urging him on. In a moment he paused, and, going back a few paces, sat down on a heap of fir poles stacked ready for next season's hops.

"My poor Symee, I forgot that I was walking as if for a wager," he said, smiling, and drawing her very tenderly toward him. "Lean against me, dear; and now let's talk this matter out—as well here as anywhere else. I suppose you can still spare a few minutes before you go back to Rushbrook House. Presently I shall climb up to the Beacon, and go and see 'Liza's grandmother. Do you know what I proposed to Mr. Kestell?"

"No—yes; you mean about Mr. Hoel Fenner's offer? Oh, Jesse, don't accept it."

"Then Mr. Kestell has been talking about it to you," said Jesse, quickly.

"Yes, he was so kind; but he showed me how very, very imprudent it would be of you to leave the firm. Of course you won't do it, Jesse dear."

"Yes, I shall do it. I have not made up my mind lightly, and I can see no reason to alter. That is not the point, Symee—"

"Oh, but it is. Jesse, please, please be advised. You are so hasty, so determined when you once set your mind upon anything. Of course you couldn't think of going against Mr. Kestell. It would be impossible. Your present position is so safe; the other is so uncertain."

Jesse made a little movement of impatience, which had the effect of shaking Symee and making her more troubled and nervous.

"Symee, do try to judge for yourself, and not repeat all Mr. Kestell's sentiments. Surely I must be a good judge. Have I been so rash all my life that now this independent action is considered preposterous? You know it is not so. I can judge, and I will accept this offer, this splendid offer, and the results will prove whether or not I have been rash. No; that's not the point; but it is this: Will you come and live with me, with the certainty, moral certainty, if not demonstrable certainty, that I can offer you a home without

fear of consequences? Symee, haven't we all our lives hoped for this and wished for this? Your presence will make all the difference to my life, and I think I can make you happy. We must be happy when we shall have honest work and each other. Look here, Symee, put away all arguments, which you can not be expected to understand, and trust your future into my hands. I can, I will make it a happy one."

"Jesse, I don't know what to say. You will misunderstand me; but, dear, dear Jesse, give it up, I do beseech you."

"Give what up?"

"This offer of Mr. Fenner. I can not come and live with you; it would only be helping you on to ruin. Keep in the old path, Jesse. What can I do to make you believe it?"

"Nonsense, Symee. Do you mean to say that you prefer staying here, kindly treated, but yet a servant, when you might be free? You might be your own mistress, and work for both of us, and you know it would make all the difference in the world to me. Haven't I been making this plan for you ever since I was a school-boy; and now, and now—"

Jesse was so much moved that he stood up and crossed his arms while the excitement he felt showed itself in every feature of his face.

Symee dared not look up at him; only she covered her face with her hands, and sobbed audibly.

"Don't, don't say all that, Jesse. Haven't I wished for it as much as you? But how can I go against my conscience, and help to spoil your life? I can't—I can't."

"Do you mean to say, Symee, that my words, my strong conviction, have no influence over you?"

"You know they have, Jesse. I would do anything for you, except things that would hurt you."

Jesse impatiently stamped his foot.

"You have been overpersuaded, Symee. You have been worked upon by Mr. Kestell. I have to thank him for this."

"No, no, it is my own idea. I am sure it is right. I saw it plainly directly Mr. Kestell explained it to me."

Symee had risen, looking the picure of misery. She tried to put her two hands round Jesse's arm, but he was too much hurt to bear her touch. Suddenly, however, a

fiercer spirit swept over him; he, who was usually as gentle as a woman, now fiercely grasped his sister's arm.

"Symee, this is the last time I ask you. You don't know what you are doing. You are depriving me of the only joy that can enter my life. You are forcing me to give up the idea of home, life, and—"

"You will thank me some day," sobbed Symee, who felt now that she was a martyr to the best cause. Though her heart was torn, yet her spirit was strong. She believed she was saving Jesse in spite of himself.

Jesse let go his sister's arm. He had felt her shrinking away from his touch, and he could not bear it; but though feeling doubly angry with her, and chiefly with Mr. Kestell, who had so well influenced her, he yet felt angry, too, with himself for having given way to this fierce anger before a weak, delicate woman.

"Then we can say no more about the subject. You had better go back now, Symee; and I am going up on to the Beacon."

"And you will give it up, then—this, this offer of Mr. Fenner?" she said, timidly.

"No, I will not," was Jesse's fierce answer as he strode away. It seemed more than he could bear just now to have his sister turning against him, for he had expected her at least to see with his eyes.

Still, even this obstacle did not move him. The more this senseless opposition met him, the more he was determined to succeed in spite of it.

As he walked up the hill he composed the letter of acceptance; and though all pleasure had gone out of the transaction, still Jesse believed, deep down in his heart, that he would succeed, and in a short time he would be able to ask Symee to come to him without even the shadow of a fear of non-success.

Jesse had not forgotten his promise to Mr. Guthrie of visiting 'Liza's grandmother, and he was now bent on this errand. The cottage stood on the edge of the Beacon plateau, and was quite away from the principal cluster of cottages that constituted the village of Rushbrook Beacon. The cottage itself was a picturesque little place, with roses clustering over a wooden porch; though these seemed to be the only luxuries about the place. As Jesse walked up,

that pretty young thing. Well, whatever it was, she was our neighbor, and we did our best for her. And it was six weeks after that she was taken ill, and when the twins was born, the doctor, who passed up here, seeing me at the cottage door, said to me: 'That poor young thing won't live, I'm afraid, Mrs. Joyce;' and, true enough, she died in a few days, and I mind how I felt sore for the young husband, who was in foreign parts."

"This is much the same as Mr. Kestell told me," said Jesse, thoughtfully; "but I believe my father died before our birth."

"Well, yes, and so I thought afterward; and Mr. Kestell was very kind to the old lady, and when I went down to see if I could do anything for her and the poor infants, she sobbed and cried, and said she had lost everything. 'Well,' says I, 'your son will come back and cheer you.' And she looks up startled like, and says, 'My son!' and then seemed to take herself up, added, 'No; no one'll come back. He's dead, too; and whatever is to happen to these poor babes I don't know. If it wasn't for Mr. Kestell, we should have been in the work-house long ago.'"

"And my grandmother died, too, soon after?" asked Jesse, beginning to think that there was something about his own history which was not quite as simple as he had always been led to believe.

"Yes, poor soul. What with the trouble of her daughter's death—for now I mind me she always called her her daughter, and there was a likeness between them, too—and the burden of them two babes, she seemed to lose heart. It was not money as was wanting either, for Mr. Kestell he was very kind. We found out afterward it was his cottage they came to, and never no rent, it's my belief, did he ask for it either. Well, she caught a bad cold on her chest, when the winter set in, and it took her off almost of a sudden like."

"And where were they buried?" asked Vicary; for, strange to say, this question had never occurred to him before.

"Not here, Mr. Vicary; but in the old parish they came from, 'tother side of the forest; and Mr. Kestell he saw to it all, and a pretty penny it must have cost him. There were some at the time that wondered why he took so much

her. We all have to learn by experience. That's what I tell Mr. Guthrie when he comes and talks so kindly, and makes me laugh with his funny sayings. It's only them as have a free conscience as can be light-hearted. 'Well,' says he, 'Mrs. Joyce, my conscience's weighted with many things, and yet I'm light-hearted.' And I says to him, 'Sir, it's very onlikely that you go against the rules.'"

"Mr. Guthrie always seems to have a kind word for every one, certainly. But about my grandmother, Mrs. Joyce. Do you know you are the first person I have met who could tell me about my relations?"

"Lor' bless me! am I now? But Mr. Kestell he could tell you more nor I could. You see, Mr. Vicary, when my husband were living in this very cottage, there was another beyond us, about half a mile below here. It's been pulled down this many a long year now; but that's where old Mrs. Vicary came with her daughter. She was a stranger to us, for she came from beyond the forest yonder; but seeing her daughter was a pretty young thing, we did what we could neighborly for them. But we wondered at the time they took such a tumble-down place as that, seeing they both looked superior kind of folk; but they kept themselves to themselves, and never talked much about their concerns."

"And you remember my mother?"

"Yes, she was as pretty a gal as you could set eyes on; but she hardly ever went into the village, and I don't believe half a dozen people saw her. She seemed downhearted like, as was natural, considering her situation, and no husband to be kind to her."

A sudden idea flashed into Jesse's brain.

"Then, Mrs. Vicary was but her mother-in-law. My father was a Vicary?"

"Well, I don't rightly know all the ins and outs. They were very close about their affairs; and when I asked the young thing one day, when I saw her sitting out by the fir wood, whether her husband wasn't coming back to her, she blushed as red as a peony, and said: 'Oh, yes, Mrs. Joyce, he's coming as soon as ever he can. He's in foreign parts.' 'Soldiering?' I said. 'No,' says she, 'not soldiering;' and then she seemed to shut up, and would say no more. So I thinks to myself, it's not all plain walking for

that pretty young thing. Well, whatever it was, she was our neighbor, and we did our best for her. And it was six weeks after that she was taken ill, and when the twins was born, the doctor, who passed up here, seeing me at the cottage door, said to me: 'That poor young thing won't live, I'm afraid, Mrs. Joyce;' and, true enough, she died in a few days, and I mind how I felt sore for the young husband, who was in foreign parts."

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trouble for the family; but there, I dare say the old lady was a servant of the family, or something like that."

"He has been a good friend to us all our lives," said Jesse, uttering a sentiment he had often before expressed; but now, for the first time, a suspicion had crept in, as he repeated to himself: "There were some at the time that wondered why he took so much trouble for the family."

He must have an answer to that question, and also to another far more important to him than Mr. Kestell's motives. If there had been one feeling which had always ruled Jesse's train of thought, it was that he was a free man, born of honest if poor parents, and, therefore, that he was bound to keep that name unsullied. He would have given up every other advantage in life rather than that one.

He had thanked Heaven again and again that he need not be ashamed to look any one in the face; that the past might be humble, but that it was blameless. And then suddenly this proud belief seemed a little shaken. He did not really doubt that there was some good explanation; but that explanation he must have at once. The doubt, however slight it might be, was galling to his proud nature; it seemed like a weight upon him that he must push off. And then, added to this, and all the more strong because of this, was that other feeling he had had before visiting Mrs. Joyce—the annoyance at Mr. Kestell's having chosen to assert a right which Jesse did not believe he had over his destiny.

"But, good heavens! has he that right?" he thought now, as, having quite mechanically taken leave of the old woman, and the others of the household, and having even received messages for 'Liza, and answered them, he walked out once more upon his native heather.

The sun had set over the moor, but the crimson glow illuminated the land of heather, making it look of a deep black purple. A slight mist was rising, as if some fair goddess had spread her thinnest veil over this favored land. The flowers were falling asleep, and the night-jars had begun to make themselves heard. Jesse walked on down the hill, and at last stopped at a small inclosure grown over and wild with grass and rank weeds; but his keen eyes at once detected the unshapely mounds that told of a cottage having once stood here. He knew the spot of old; but had

never suspected before that this was his birthplace. He looked round on the wild scene, and noted that, far above, a few of the Beacon cottage lights could be seen; while opposite, where the gorgeous red showed the spot whence the sun had lately disappeared, he gazed at the long line of forest land and the great clumps of firs.

"Her eyes saw this," he said, sitting down on a low bank, regardless of the damp and dew. "What were her thoughts? Who was my father? Was she not the old woman's daughter—"

Jesse rose suddenly, hurried forward by the strange tumult of his feelings.

"I will go to him. I will go this very evening, and he must tell me. If I have had wrong thoughts, Heaven forgive me; but if he has kept back something from me, then—"

Forgetting all the visions of success which had lately engrossed him, Jesse hurried onward.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARRESTED.

THERE was joy in Rushbrook House this evening, for the mistress of the place seemed suddenly to have made a step in the right direction. As many fanciful invalids are apt to do, she had changed her lugubrious ideas of seclusion, and now declared that she felt well enough to dine with her family. In a small way it was quite a little jubilee festivity, and Mr. Kestell's face was radiant with happiness. He could hardly make enough of his wife; and even Amice forgot her secret trouble as she saw her mother sitting, dressed in a gray brocade, trimmed profusely with old lace, ready to be taken in to dinner by her husband.

Amice went up to her mother and stroked her hand.

"Mother, this is a pleasure," she said, softly. At this moment they were alone, and alone with her mother Amice was herself. "I believe it is the idea of losing Elva that has made you stay down-stairs."

This was true enough; the sudden excitement of a lover and suitor had roused her.

"What do you think of him, Amice? I don't suppose,

however, he is your sort. You would only be fit to marry a clergyman."

Amice smiled; she was used to these jokes.

"I don't want to marry any one, mother dear, but I think the London life will suit Elva. She will like meeting clever people; and Mr. Hoel Fenner is thought so well of, and he is so clever and good-looking."

"Well, I call him charming. But Elva is so hard to please. Do you think she will decide in his favor? Of course, he is not rich, and has no title; still, the Fenners are a very old family, they are related to the Courtneys and the Pellews. Just get me down the 'Peerage,' dear. Your aunt Fitzgerald will be mad with jealousy that one of my daughters should be married first, and she will, I know, find something spiteful to say about Mr. Fenner's family."

Amice did not answer. The worst of her, her mother often said, was that if you spoke evil of any one, she was silent. And this really made poor Amice a very dull companion to a woman whose turn of mind was decidedly worldly.

"Yes, here it is: the Pellews are first cousins to the Fenners. Strange! I must ask Mr. Fenner if he knows any of them. When Mrs. Eagle Bennison next calls, I should like to see her. She knows all the modern generations better than I do. She does like people of title, because she has none herself. That is why she is always harping on her grandfather."

"But Elva will not like this talked about till she has made up her mind."

"Of course she will be talked about; but it will come all right. Girls don't accept in this way, and find out they don't like a man. I believe she really likes him."

"I think she will do so," said Amice, more guardedly. "But Elva will not do things by halves; she will love him with all her heart, or not at all."

"Young ladies were not like this when I was young. When suitors appeared for us girls, it was my father who chose. We should not have dared to refuse. But now girls are so very independent."

Mrs. Kestell did not add that only one suitor, her husband, had ever proposed for her hand.

At this moment Mr. Kestell himself appeared. He had

taken such pains with his evening toilet that even his wife smiled at the result.

"There is no dinner-party, Josiah. Where's Elva? Late as usual?"

"No; I heard her. She thinks now she is a privileged person. Well, dear, this is nice."

Amice had retired at her father's approach, and as Mr. Kestell sat down near his wife, and clasped her hand in both his, they might have still, to all appearance, been lovers.

"Well, I do feel better. It is, I believe, because I have left off Doctor Horne's prescription; he does not in the least understand my case. Elva, my dear, let me look at you. What a pity Mr. Fenner is not here! That pale salmon color suits her admirably, doesn't it, Josiah?"

"Please, mamma, don't begin to criticise dress," laughed Elva; "it reminds me of Mrs. Eagle Bennison whom I have just met. She told me that some of the ladies who attended her meeting for the Training of the Adult Poor were really so dowdy that she feared they did not fully recognize how essential it was to dress up to their station! By the way, Amice, you are in sad disgrace with her serene highness; she says that if you will go and nurse the sick in their own homes, you will undo all the good which the Taps mean to accomplish. I told her the poor looked upon you as one of themselves, so that you would not injure the Taps. And she said, 'How very shocking!' And she begs you will go and talk it over with her."

"I quite agree with her," said poor Mrs. Kestell, taking her husband's arm, while the two sisters followed them into the dining-room.

That quartet would have delighted any aristocratic eye —the handsome, benign-looking father, the gentle mother in gray brocade, the two daughters, both so rich in gifts of all kinds; then, to add to this, all the outward and very visible signs of taste, culture, and wealth.

If there were any shadow on the brilliant picture, it was Amice's nervous, startled look when addressed by her father; but this evening Elva and Mrs. Kestell carried on the conversation, and both the master of the house and Amice remained silent.

"By the way, papa," said the former, when the servants had retired, "what is the matter with Symee? Her

eyes were as red as lobsters with crying while she was dressing me. She could only say that Jesse was angry with her, but that you had been very kind."

Mr. Kestell frowned slightly.

"It is merely that that foolish fellow wants to throw up his work for something Mr. Fenner has offered him; but Fenner knows nothing of Vicary's capabilities, and it is really leading him to ruin. I met Symee when I went to dress, and told her she had done quite rightly in not encouraging her brother."

"Why should not Jesse Vicary choose for himself?" said Amice, looking up and gazing at her father with those deep-seeing blue eyes which annoyed him so much.

"Because, naturally, having always taken great interest in him, I wish to save him from making a mistake. Besides, he wants to take Symee away from here and make a home for her in those slums. The suggestion is absurd and impossible."

"I am glad you put your foot down upon it," said Mrs. Kestell. "We couldn't possibly spare Symee now, she is so useful to me; and really, after all the trouble you took for those penniless children, you have a right to settle what you think best for them."

"Why have we a right?" said Amice; and Elva, noting her father's annoyance, made a sign to her sister to be quiet.

"I think, Amice, it would be better you should not interfere about this matter. I can not explain all the strong reasons why it is better that Vicary should steadily go on in his present position. Believe me, they are for his advantage."

"Mr. Fenner will agree with you, I am sure," said Elva, "when you explain it to him."

"Of course he will. So Mr. Fenner has already written to you, I see," said Mr. Kestell, turning the subject.

"Yes; he sent me a line by early post, saying he wanted me to read a book he had reviewed."

Elva was not yet shy about Mr. Fenner. She did not know her own mind; but she did like thinking of all he had said. The first time one is loved all the world looks brighter, for Elva did not want Walter Akister's love. She tried to believe that interview had never taken place, and that it had only been a bad dream.

There were all the pleasant signs of happy well-being when they went back to the drawing-room: the paper, the pretty tea-table, the open piano with lighted wax-candles; all little nothings in themselves, but which had become a necessity to three of the inmates of Rushbrook.

Amice went to the window, and pulling aside the heavy curtains, said to Elva, who followed her:

"It is a lovely night, Elva. Do you see the fog has cleared away?"

"Yes; and how beautiful the moon is."

"Don't say anything about it to them," whispered Amice; "but I shall go to old Mrs. Brown again to-night. At ten o'clock will be early enough."

"What nonsense! What, sit up again?"

"Yes; I like it. I am so strong it does not hurt me, and her daughter is almost done up."

"Do take some one."

Amice laughed.

"Why, it's not far from the Home Farm, and no one goes on that road, you know. Mrs. Brown has a claim on us, being our shepherd's wife."

Elva said no more. She knew from experience that nothing turned Amice away from her purpose when her mind was made up, and it was wiser to let her do as she liked.

At this moment the butler opened the door, and said, in a clear voice:

"Mr. Vicary, sir. He begs to know if you could give him a few minutes on particular business. He can wait."

Mr. Kestell put down the paper, and Elva came forward to the tea-table.

"Papa, you must have your tea first," she said.

"Why do people come in the evening?" said Mrs. Kestell. "I am sure Jesse Vicary could come to-morrow morning. Tell him so, Josiah."

"I dare say it's something about the Home Farm. Yes, Jones, tell him to wait. Show him into my study. There's a fire still there, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

And the imperturbable Jones retired as if all his movements were regulated by ingenious machinery.

"You had better have sent him away," said Mrs. Kes-

tell. "If he's come about taking Symee to London, don't give in."

"If he insists, I shall wash my hands of them both; but Symee is too wise a girl to be led away."

Amice had remained behind the curtain, gazing at the moonlit scene; but this remark seemed to draw her away from the beautiful view.

"Mamma, we could spare her if it were to do her good, to be a comfort to her brother. We don't understand freedom, because we always have it; but it must be hard to be always at the beck and call of somebody, as Symee is, and no home to go to ever."

Amice spoke almost passionately.

"What nonsense you talk, Amice," said her mother, peevishly. "Compared with the lot of thousands of young women, Symee has indeed fallen on her legs. Your ridiculous notions about the poor will prevent your ever finding a husband. No gentleman would put up with such socialistic ideas."

"I was only trying to put myself in her place," said Amice, with a far-off look, and showing no annoyance.

Elva was handing the tea, and wishing to spare Amice further reproach, she said:

"It's no use quarreling with people who keep all the commandments, mamma. You see they always get the best of us somewhere. As to Symee, it's trouble wasted, for she had the chance of going away, and, as papa says, she refused."

"It is difficult to know how to be free," said Amice. Then, afraid of her own boldness, she retired again behind the curtain, while Elva talked on to her father.

The beauty of that happy evening, however, had faded away, and no one exactly knew why. Mr. Kestell listened attentively to his wife as she began a long discourse about her sister in London; but he originated no more remarks, and seemed to be preoccupied. And when, tea being over, the bell was rung for Symee, he did not even ask his wife to stay longer, but he made her take his arm, and he himself helped her upstairs.

"Darling," he whispered, "this has been a great pleasure to me. Our long married life has been marred by nothing but your health, has it, dear?"

His eyes seemed to await the answer with intense anxiety.

"Of course not, Josiah; but that has been a great drawback to any pleasures one looked forward to."

"Yes, of course it has, dear," he sighed, and relapsed into silence till he remarked, on reaching the top of the stairs: "We might have been poorer, but then you would have missed all your former comforts."

"But really, Josiah, we never have been poor. You speak as if you were going to be a bankrupt." Mrs. Kestell looked nervously at her husband.

"Oh, no, no, dear, nothing of the kind. Even if it were possible in my affairs—which it is not—I have tied up your fortune so that it can not be touched. I think I have foreseen everything, dearest."

Mrs. Kestell was reassured, and now remembered she was tired, though she added, as she entered the room:

"My father used to say that it was almost necessary for the fortune of business men's wives to be quite separate."

"But you would not mind sharing poverty with me, would you, dear?"

"Whatever good would that do you? Good-night. Ah, Symee! there you are. I should like the patent night-light this evening."

Mr. Kestell walked slowly out of the room. Once he turned back to see if his wife were looking after him. But no; she had gone at once to her table to examine night-lights, having a fad about their size and make.

He heaved a little sigh of disappointment; but there was not one word, or one thought of blame for her in his mind. He knew, by long experience, that you can not expect sweet fruit from an ungrafted tree. His love, strong and deep as it had been, had never been able to graft anything upon the illustrious stock of Ovenden. On the contrary, the gentle, amiable girl had become a selfish woman. To watch deterioration in those we love gives far greater pain than to be conscious of our own backsliding; for the latter is always accompanied with the secret belief that we could change the state of things if we would, while in the other case our hands are often bound and tied, and we can but watch without being able to bring any help.

Now Mr. Kestell once again stood in his own hall and paused. He hung his head and gazed at the beautifully tessellated pavement where Cupid was leading captive a train of Naiads, who danced on happily on their way to

ruin, regardless of the Seasons who were encircled in the four corners of the hall, and carried each so many emblems that mistake as to their identity was impossible.

Mr. Kestell's eyes by accident rested on Cupid's face, which, being composed of small bits of marble, looked, if seen too close, somewhat as if he had the small-pox: moreover, Cupid's eyes were overlarge and leering, the artist having wished to express that the eyes are dangerous love-messengers. Had this Cupid come to life he would have frightened away any coy, timid maidens: but he was, happily, still and lifeless, and the love and joy, the dancing and the mirth, remained ever the same, whatever might be the mood of the spectators in Mr. Kestell's much-admired hall.

Cupid's features were evidently not enlivening or soothing: for the master of Rushbrook House slowly raised his head and looked first at the drawing-room door, and then toward his study. His inclination evidently drew him toward the drawing-room, from which issued sounds of music. The two sisters were singing a duet: and this, even to a man who was not a fond father, would have been a musical treat. On the other hand, Mr. Kestell knew that Jesse Vicary was seated in his study, and had already been there some time, waiting for him.

He took a step forward, quite uncertain as to his decision, then slowly walked toward the drawing-room.

"He can wait," he murmured. "Why does he come at this time of night?" He went still quicker: his hand was on the handle of the door: Amice's rich contralto was enticing, and Elva's soprano harmonized exactly with her sister's notes. But though Mr. Kestell had got so far, he was suddenly seized with an overpowering impulse to change his mind. "I had better go and get it over," he said, this time to himself. He let go the handle so gently that no sound could be heard by the singers, and turned his back on the pleasant sounds.

At this moment Jones was coming across the hall, carrying a Bible, and met his master face to face.

"Ah, yes, Jones, I had forgotten. I suppose Vicary has not gone?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. Tell the young ladies there will be no prayers this evening, and that I am not to be disturbed

again. If I am late I will let Vicary out. Don't let any one sit up."

"Yes, sir."

Then Jones and the Bible went back to where they came from, and Mr. Kestell walked boldly to the study door and opened it.

The fire had burned low in the grate, and no candles had been lighted, much to Mr. Kestell's surprise, but also to his secret relief: he opened the door upon a much darkened room, the occasional flicker showing, however, that a manly form was there, standing with folded arms by a chair near the fire.

"My dear Vicary, what! no light! Really, what can Jones have been thinking of? I must apologize for this very bad reception."

Mr. Kestell seized the poker, and at once a bright flame shot upward, showing the earnest and very anxious face of Jesse Vicary.

"It was my fault, sir," he said, very quietly. "I told your butler I preferred being in the dark till you came."

"Well, I am glad it was your choice, for Rushbrook prides itself on its hospitality. Do me the kindness to light the candle, Vicary. Thank you. Now take a comfortable chair, and let me hear all you want to say. No one will disturb us."

"Thank you, sir," said Jesse, unfolding his arms and moving a heavy, straight-backed and leather-covered chair near to him, while Mr. Kestell walked to his arm-chair in front of his imposing knee-hold table, and sat down, folding his hands and looking toward his visitor with an expression of kind attention to what he might have to say.

"I really must apologize again, Vicary, for my apparent rudeness; but this evening my wife was down-stairs, and such an unusual event made it impossible for me to come sooner."

"I had no right to come so late," said Jesse, rather dreamily. "I ought to apologize; not you, sir. I ought to have waited, perhaps; but the truth is, sir, I could not go to bed till—till I had seen you."

"Really? Don't distress yourself about that. I am quite at leisure now. Indeed, I shall enjoy a chat. I am afraid that you are bearing me a little grudge about our

former interview. Poor Symee was much distressed when she came in."

"No, sir; I don't think 'grudge' was the word. You have a right to your opinion, and I did turn it over many times in my mind to see if I was wrong; but I couldn't see it in your light. I hope I am not obstinate; but a man must learn to choose sooner or later in his life, and I thought that that time had come for me. I hoped Symee would see it in that light, too, sir; but she has never had to choose before, and she is easily influenced by those about her. I was angry about it to-day; but since then I have considered more deeply, and I see that, perhaps, it's natural, and that, as you have been very kind to her, she has the right to say what she prefers."

Jesse paused. Mr. Kestell wondered if this were all the young man had come to say. He gave a little sigh of relief, and, taking up a paper-cutter, his face assumed a look of real and very genuine kindness. Jesse saw it, for he was looking straight at him.

"I hope I am fair in my judgment, Vicary. My legal life has, perhaps, taught me to strike the balance evenly and justly between two sides. Perhaps I, too, was rather warm on the subject to-day; but though I may be mistaken, I still adhere to my opinion. However, I must not part from you to-night knowing you are thinking hardly of me. You have claimed your right of choice. Well, though I am sorry, naturally, but perhaps not quite fairly, to give up all control of your future, yet I must grant you the privilege of choice. Some day, my dear Vicary, you will look back with regret to the time when you had no free choice. But I know these sentiments, when offered from experience to inexperience, are seldom welcome, so I will spare you."

A very genial smile parted the lips of Mr. Kestell; it seemed to radiate over every feature of his face. But this graciousness, which at another time would quite have won over Jesse, now seemed almost powerless to affect him. A deeper thought filled his mind.

"Thank you, sir, I must accept my freedom; not because I'm not deeply grateful for your past kindness, but because I feel I must be a man now; life seems so often to offer difficulties which there is nothing for it but to solve one's self, unhelped by others; a man and his better or

worse nature have to struggle and conquer, or be conquered."

"You take too strong a view of youthful temptations, my dear Vicary. If I were not thoroughly well informed about your excellent conduct, you would make me believe in all kinds of black deeds. I do not think your sins have a very powerful voice. If you do not proclaim them from a house-top, they will, I am sure, hardly be heard."

The half-jocose tone of the old man did not harmonize with the tumultuous feelings in Jesse's mind.

"I came here to-night about a matter of much more concern to me, sir, than what I shall do with my future. It has all come over me this afternoon, and I feel there is no one but you who can set me at rest about it. If it seems a trifle to you, it is almost more than life to me."

Jesse could not sit still; he rose up and stood by the fireplace; and Mr. Kestell noticed that this question, whatever it might be, was really important to the young man. For a moment—and Jesse did not see it, as hardly knowing how to bring forward his subject, he turned toward the fire—Mr. Kestell's face relaxed, a haggard expression came over his features, his hand trembled visibly, so that he put down the paper-cutter, and, clinching his right hand, he put it down firmly on the table. There was in his look an unspoken expression of weariness, as of one ready to give up the struggle. If this feeling had come over him, he must have mastered it in a few moments, for when Jesse turned round again, the same half smile played on the lips of Mr. Kestell of Greystone.

"Well, Jesse, speak out; what is it? We are alone. You had better say all that is in your mind."

"Forgive me, sir, if I can not express what I feel clearly; it is none the less important to my happiness—yes, to the happiness of my whole life."

"Then it is a very serious question?"

"Yes, and you alone can take away the burden of it. Tell me, Mr. Kestell, now that you have granted me my freedom—tell me what a free man has a right to know—give me an outline of my early history. Who were my parents—and—and—"

Jesse paused; even now he dared not put the question plainly.

"My dear fellow, is that what is weighing on your mind?

Why, of course, the curiosity is natural; but I really thought I had satisfied it long ago, and had told you the outline. Your mother and grandmother rented one of my cottages a month or two before you were born. The poor young thing died two days after the birth of her twins, and the old woman a month or six weeks—I forget the exact date—after that. I promised them—certainly the mother—that I would befriend her children; and, really, to the best of my ability, I have kept my word. I think you will grant this to me in spite of our little difference of opinion."

"My mother's name was Vicary, my grandmother was also called Vicary; then, was the connection between them that of mother and daughter-in-law? You see my meaning, sir? I have been talking to old Mrs. Joyce, who has lately come to live with her son's wife. She remembered my birth."

Mr. Kestell cleared his throat.

"Has she come home? I did not know that. I should certainly have gone to inquire after her. Yes, of course, that cottage belongs to the Joyces—a squatter family. I should, if I could have my way, buy up all those squatters; they lower the value of the surrounding land."

"But, sir, tell me what you know. I would rather hear the truth. I must have an answer. I think what has upheld me all my life—through many troubles which a fatherless lad alone can understand—is, knowing that, though my parents were poor, I was the son of an honest couple; that I could hold up my head, because poverty is no crime, and that the best inheritance a lad can have is an honest name. Was my father old Mrs. Vicary's son?"

There was a conscious pause; conscious, that is, to both of them. Mr. Kestell was visibly agitated, and Jesse saw that he was. His clinched hand on the table could not prevent that agitation which was taking place in his mind from being noticeable. Jesse thought he knew the cause, namely, unwillingness to tell bad news; but as a man falling from a great height grasps at any support, however powerless to uphold him, he, Jesse, hung on the answer to the question he had asked, and his heart almost stopped beating, though he fancied he heard the sound of the monosyllable before it issued from Mr. Kestell's lips.

"No."

Mr. Kestell's voice was very low.

"Was my father's name Vicary? Was he a cousin, or—"

"No," repeated Mr. Kestell, in the same low tone.

"Have I the right only to bear my mother's maiden name?"

Jesse put the last question in desperation. He felt he knew the worst already, but he was impelled to ask for the fullest confirmation of it. This time there was a longer pause than before. Mr. Kestell rose from his seat and came toward the fire-place, where Jesse was standing with folded arms, seeming to gather some kind of strength from this attitude, and to be bracing himself to hear the worst. Whatever was the reason which made the old man wish for time before answering, Jesse never considered. The answer was so important to him that he found no difficulty in believing that it ought to be well weighed before it was given.

Previously, on the same day, he had fancied Mr. Kestell was hard and self-opinionated in reference to his future; but now, when his benefactor put his hand on his arm with a gentle, sympathetic movement, the younger man experienced a revulsion of feeling. When we are abased in our own eyes, the expression of sympathy from a fellow-creature is tenfold more precious to us. It is like healing balm on an open wound, like ice on a burning forehead.

"My dear Jesse, don't ask me; don't take this to heart. I would rather not be the—the one to answer you. I assure you, it is of no consequence; let us talk of other things."

"Thank you," said Jesse, hoarsely, though he knew not for what he was thanking Mr. Kestell, save for that gentle touch of sympathy. Now he knew the worst, nothing else mattered.

"Now about this offer. Thinking everything over again, I am sure I was wrong to speak as strongly as I did. I—I was perhaps too hasty. I was thinking of Symee, our own grief at parting from her; and really, as I said, all things considered, I dare say with your energy and cleverness—you are certainly clever—you might make it a success. I don't say I fully believe it, but if there is a chance of success, I ought not to stand in your way."

Mr. Kestell spoke so hurriedly, and was evidently so much moved that he hardly seemed able to speak with his

usual clearness and conciseness; but Jesse Vicary was far too much occupied with his own thoughts to heed these signs.

"Thank you; there is no hurry about my decision. I must go now, sir. I—I—in fact, I don't feel able to see everything clearly yet. Good-night, and thank you for all your sympathy."

Jesse held out his hand, and, hiding a momentary hesitation, Mr. Kestell took it and shook it warmly.

"Not a word more of thanks. Vicary, I think you may rely on my help about this situation; but take my advice —leave Symee here till you see how you manage; then, after a time, we might do something for you both. Symee must have a little outfit and some furniture—a little kind of wedding feast, eh? Take a cheerful view of the future, and all will come right."

"Thank you," said Jesse again; this time quite mechanically.

The future was nothing to him at this moment; all the golden light had faded out of it. He went toward the door and stood on the threshold, holding it open with one hand. It would have touched most hearts to see the alteration in the strong young man's bearing. This morning he had been so powerful in his own strength; now he seemed utterly subdued and a mere shadow of the former Jesse Vicary.

Standing so, and saying not a word, seemed strange, indeed. Mr. Kestell, who still faced him, appeared to think so, for he repeated again:

"All will come right, Vicary; all will come right."

Jesse shook his head.

"*That* can never come right;" and then, without waiting for another word, he crossed the hall and went out.

Left alone, Mr. Kestell did not go back to his writing-table, but sunk down into a large arm-chair opposite the seat Jesse had lately left. Mr. Kestell looked fixedly at the empty chair, as if Jesse were still in it, and so remained for some time.

"I spoke the truth," he said at last, after that long silence; "I spoke the truth; any other but he would not have taken it to heart. He would not hear me out—no. I forget; I did not tell him. It was impossible, quite im-

possible. I have expected this a long time. Good Heaven, how hot the room is!"

He rose and went to a side window, which he threw open. The night air blew freshly in, and seemed to restore him partially to himself.

"Yes, yes; he had better go to Mr. Fenner's office; and work will be the best remedy; it will make him forget. But my wife can not spare Symee, and she must be thought of first; yes, first. Ah!"

He breathed a deep sigh, and then very deliberately he returned to his desk and began writing a letter to Hoel Fenner, though he knew it could not go till the next day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OFFER REFUSED.

When once out of the grounds, Jesse Vicary took the road by the Pools; it was the way to the Home Farm, so he took it by instinct, not by any conscious act of choice. The trees that bordered the water were black and mysterious-looking in the shadow, and the moonlight appeared in other places so brilliant as to cheat one into fancying it was daylight. Had it been pitch-dark it would have been all the same to Jesse; he saw nothing around him; only the overwhelming feeling surged up again and again, like the certain advance of cruel waves: "I have not even an honest name; not that which I care most about—oh, heavens, not even that!" Soon he came to the turn to the Home Farm; he opened the gate, and went on up the lane, and past the fir plantation, where the moonlight did not reach. At the furthest end of the wood was a great heap of felled trees, close to the road-side. As a drunken man who can go no further, Jesse Vicary staggered toward these; he found that walking did not ease his pain, and he sunk down on the hard logs and tried to be calmer. The pain of the shame seemed like hot irons on tender flesh; he felt branded with it. He had had no such trial before; so it seemed to him as he groaned out:

"Not even an honest name; and yet I would willingly resign everything for that. And Mr. Kestell has known it all along; and my proud wishes must have seemed ridiculous to him. What am I? Nothing—nothing, a scorn of men, and the outcast of the people. But that I

myself should hear this, should find it out. Many would not care, but I do; and it is death to me. Can it be true? Let me see—did I put it plainly? Good heavens, yes, only too plainly."

He laid his head on the cold, dewy trunks, and listened to the night wind sobbing above—sobbing, sobbing out his shame, he thought. Then his mind went back to Golden Sparrow Street, to all the poor and outcast there, to his friends whom he had so willingly served.

"But I did it from a higher pedestal," thought he, "and this is my punishment. I felt better, greater than they, when all the time many of them were far above me—ay, many of them had an honest name, of which they had no cause to be ashamed."

Then with the moan of the fir-trees something better seemed to be whispered to him. This trial was not of his own making, or of his own seeking.

He bent his head on his arms, which now rested on his knees; he wanted to shrink into nothing, if that were possible. The dew fell on his hair, and gathered about his garments; the night-jar notes sounded like a death-knell; a squirrel, disturbed from its sleep, ran up some branches of the fir near to him; but he took no notice. Nor did he remember that at the farm they went early to bed, and that they would wonder at his absence.

All at once he was roused, however; not by any of the sounds of Nature, which he knew too well to be surprised at, but by the softest tread on the fir-needle-covered path. He did not raise his head; he cared too little for any one to believe that he should be noticed, or, if noticed, only treated as a curious wayfarer. Yes, it was a woman's step—light, and quick, and strong. Nearer and nearer came the steps; perhaps a lass returning from meeting her lover. It was best for both of them that he should appear unconscious of her presence, or asleep; but strange, the footsteps ceased when close beside him, and a strange thrill passed through Jesse's frame, when a hand was put upon his shoulder, and a voice which he knew said:

"Jesse Vicary, you are in trouble. Can I help you?"

It was Amice Kestell on her way to Mrs. Brown's cottage, where she was going to sit up with the invalid.

Jesse stood up now, ashamed of being found by her here—ashamed of the very reason that was crushing his spirit;

but he was not going to tell her a lie. Was she not the embodiment of his heaven?

"Yes," he answered; "it's a sore trouble, Miss Kestell; but not one that can be helped by anybody."

She hardly looked like an ordinary human being as she stood half in shadow and half in moonlight; and to Jesse, who knew nothing of her errand, there came the idea that she was an angel who had taken the form of Amice Kestell.

"If no one can help you, take your trouble to—God. I know He will. At eventide there will be light. . . ."

Amice said this in a dreamy voice, and looked out from the gloom of the wood to the full moonlight beyond, as if to ask for confirmation of Nature.

Jesse did not answer. He was too much crushed to be easily raised up, and Amice added:

"I mustn't stay; they are expecting me at Mrs. Brown's. If you are on your way to the farm, will you carry this basket for me as far as the shepherd's cottage? Symee will be so glad to hear about your doing this for me, to-morrow, when I get home."

Jesse took the basket with almost trembling fingers. Before to-day he would have felt in a seventh heaven of bliss to be able to render this slight service; now he was glad, indeed, but as a servant might be glad to carry for his lord.

"You ought not to walk alone, Miss Kestell," he said, after a long silence, wondering at her courage, and fearful for her safety, though he knew not why.

"Who would hurt me? You are thinking of London; but will you tell me one thing now I have the chance of asking you? Do you want Symee very much to come and live with you?"

"I did; but not now. I want her to be happy as long as possible. With me, she would have to accept my sorrow and that of many others."

"It is very sweet to share the sorrow of those we love. I think Symee would find it so after a time."

"No; I could not bear her reproaches. Thank you, Miss Kestell, but things must take their course."

The cottage was close by, and Amice paused to take back her basket from his hands.

"You will go home," she said, "and not stay out in the damp."

The tone of authority and the womanly thought for his welfare touched Jesse deeply.

"I will, as you say so. Good-night, Miss Kestell, I shall not have another opportunity for thanking you for all your kind words and kind deeds. Will you believe that they will be my greatest help and comfort when I am away? I shall know Symee has one good friend."

He gave her back her basket, and was turning away with bared head; but Amice held out her hand, and he took it and wrung it.

"Good-night," she said. "I know about your work in London. Symee tells me about it. Would you care to know that your example suggested many things to me? If we help others we shall be helped ourselves when our own troubles seem the heaviest. I know it; yes, by experience. Good-bye."

She turned away, and Jesse watched her go swiftly up the cottage path, watched her knock and enter, and then with a "God bless her!" he turned homeward a little comforted. The earth contained an Amice Kestell; it must then be still sweet to live in.

The next day Hoel, sitting in that most comfortable arm-chair in his most comfortable lodgings, received two notes, both of which surprised him much, and caused him some curious thoughts. He knew the handwriting of one of them, and the postmark of the other told him that it came from Mr. Kestell. He opened this one first in preference to that written by Jesse Vicary.

"DEAR FENNER,—I have had another conversation with Vicary, and I find that he is so bent upon accepting your kind offer that I have given up my objections to the plan, and I now hope he will find that I am wrong and he right as to the result. I merely write this line for fear he may not have thoroughly understood that I offer no further objections to his accepting the post.

"We are looking forward to seeing you on Saturday. My little girl seems to me to look already brighter and happier. May this be a good omen for you; but remember, I wish her to be quite free.

"Very sincerely yours, "J. KESTELL."

Hoel opened the other letter, knowing it was the acceptance, and glad that he had succeeded in his plan; but, to his surprise, he found that he was mistaken.

"DEAR MR. FENNER,—I am writing a line before returning to London. Circumstances have occurred which oblige me to refuse your kind offer. I am none the less grateful, and if my work can ever be of the least use to you, I shall be glad to employ my small leisure in your service. At present I shall go on in my old quarters, as my sister does not wish to leave Rushbrook, and I have come to the conclusion that most likely she is right. My decision has nothing to do with Mr. Kestell's opposition, and is unalterable.

"Yours most gratefully,
"JESSE VICARY."

Hoel whistled softly.

"Something has happened, all the same. That man is not one to change for nothing. He wishes me to think that Mr. Kestell is not at the bottom of it; but that I decline to do, otherwise I should not have received these notes simultaneously. Strange! What can Mr. Kestell's influence be, that it is able so easily to overturn the will of years? It is monstrous! Why, too, should he take so much interest in those twins? Ah! I forgot—philanthropy; I meant to do something of the sort some day myself; though on the whole, I shall, I fancy, content myself with matrimony. Shall I win Elva Kestell? Yes, I must; she is worth winning. She will look beautiful when—"

Here Hoel lost himself in such a blissful dream of his own happiness, that the affairs of Jesse Vicary slowly faded from his mind, and when they returned, he was inclined to be angry with him, because he knew the editor would smile when he heard that Hoel Fenner's "hidden treasure of a genius" had refused to be brought to light. Which was indeed the case, though Hoel pleasantly turned off the joke by saying:

"Well, you know the world knows nothing of its greatest men; evidently Vicary is one of them."

"Then Acton Birch can have the offer?"

"I suppose so," said Hoel; and there the matter ended.

Symee, too, received a note from her brother, over the contents of which Amice found her weeping bitterly; and

it was this note which first made Amice Kestell think strange thoughts, the fruit of which was to alter her whole life. Symee, in her sorrow, allowed her to read it:

"DEAR SYMEE,—Don't be angry with me. Heaven knows I want your sympathy now more than ever. I shall be in London before you receive this. My holiday has no longer any charm for me. I must begin my life over again, and the new foundations must be made; and one only knows how deep I must go before finding a firm place. You will not understand this. I do not wish you to do so, little sister. Do not think I am blaming you; you are right to stay where you are. I have given up Mr. Hoel Fenner's offer; the only bright thing about it is that this will perhaps please you. You begged me so hard to give it up. The reason of this is, however, of no consequence to any but myself. God bless you.

"Your loving brother,

"JESSE."

———o———

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

BEING QUESTIONED.

"TABULA RASA," the white page which the great bounding heart of youth is so anxious to see filled in with the sweet experience of life and of love. How very easily it expands ready for this beautiful picture to be photographed on it; and then all at once the young discover that the finger which is writing slowly on that soft, easily impressed substance, is spelling, not the word Joy, but the two syllables Sorrow.

Joy is not a myth, however, though one is sometimes tempted to ask—what is it? Is it to be found in success, in possessions, in admiration, or in love? All in succession answer "No;" and yet every young heart disbelieves, and says, positively: "It is somewhere, and I must find it."

And Elva Kestell's warm, loving heart said, very loudly indeed: "Joy is in love, and I am finding it."

The pair of gray ponies at the door of Rushbrook House pawed impatiently for the time when they might trot off. They appeared to know they were starting on a joyous errand, and were going to meet a lover; and though Elva was also eager to be off, she yet could not start without first saying good-bye to her father.

Mr. Kestell had not been very well lately. It was nothing serious, the doctor said, he "wanted tone;" by which happy expression the members of the faculty cover a large amount of ignorance concerning the diseases of their fellow-creatures, because their minds are so rigidly fixed upon flesh and blood that they smile at the word spirit. If you want tone, you must have a tonic: and so neatly wrapped-up and labeled bottles had been carried by Jones into the study, with as much care as he carried the Bible, before prayers, at night, into the drawing-room. One good of Mr. Kestell's wanting tone was that his wife revived visibly in order to be able to tell him oftener that there was really nothing the matter with him, and that the doctor was all wrong. Mrs. Kestell, like many invalids, had a rooted objection to any one but herself being on the sick list; so she did all she could to persuade her husband that the best thing he could do was to go to Greystone as usual.

But Mr. Kestell seemed quite glad to be able to rest for a whole week and to enjoy the society of his wife and his daughters; or, rather, of Elva, for every day seemed to make a wider breach between him and Amice. There was no apparent reason for this; but though both knew the fact, no one else noticed anything very different from usual in their intercourse.

Elva entered the study to-day like a strong, joyous, summer breeze, and, at the sight of her, Mr. Kestell's face brightened visibly.

"Papa, I'm off: the ponies are impatient. You must look more like yourself by the time Hoel comes. Suppose you come, too?"

"Three's not company, miss," he said, holding the bright face between his hands; "and so you are a little impatient, too, as well as the ponies. Will he get his answer to-day?"

Elva blushed. That was a good sign, her father thought.

"Are you anxious to get rid of me, papa?" she said.

"I don't want to be selfish, darling; and the more I see of Hoel Fenner the better I like him."

"So do I, papa," and Elva laughed so happily that Mr. Kestell gave a little sigh of relief.

"Then why wait longer before giving him certainty?"

Elva stood up quite straight, looking taller than usual, the dark-gray eyes seemed to light up with a new expression of hope and happiness.

"Because, though I do like him better every time I see him, I am not quite sure if I love him enough; and as he must always be my friend, I want to be quite, quite sure. The other day I read this: 'He that does a base thing for his friend burns the golden thread that ties their hearts together.' I am so afraid of saying 'Yes' to please him before I am quite, quite sure."

Mr. Kestell looked up at his child with a strange expression, which made Elva say quickly, and in a tone a little hurt:

"You don't believe me, papa?"

"Good heavens, child, of course I believe you; but I am anxious not to keep him waiting too long. It seems hardly fair, I mean—"

"Oh, papa, I do believe the doctor is right. You do want something to set you up again. You are not a bit like yourself. It is ever since—oh, yes, I remember—since that time Jesse Vicary came here. Hoel says that he can make nothing of his refusal, and that there must be some mystery about it which we can not fathom."

"My dear Elva, remember the ponies; you really must not keep them waiting any longer. Take care when you get to Greystone not to— I mean Jupiter does not like the train."

"Well, yes, I must go. Good-bye, you dear old dad; take all that bottle of stuff before I come back, so as to be fit society for that clever Mr. Fenner. Isn't it strange he cares about me so much?"

"Not at all strange, child. Now good-bye."

Amice was in the hall, ready to go out into the village. She had a covered basket in her hand; but to those who knew her she seemed paler, more thoughtful than usual, if that were possible.

Elva nodded and smiled at her mother, who looked out

of the drawing-room window at her, told Amice to see that there were fresh flowers in the drawing-room, and then stepped quickly into the pretty pony-chaise, and drove off. Mr. Kestell stood there watching his darling with loving eyes; and so engaged was he in this occupation, that he did not notice that Amice still remained near to him till he was startled by her voice saying:

"Papa."

He turned round quickly; all the look of joy died out of his eyes, and only an anxious expression remained.

"Well, my dear Amice? I thought you had gone on. The afternoon seems clouding over, and you must be at home when Mr. Fenner comes back."

It was only the expression of his face that altered, the words were as gentle and as kind as if they were addressed to Elva.

"I am going, but I wanted to ask you something, papa; and yet I hardly know if I may?"

It was so rare for Amice to originate a remark, that it was no wonder her father looked surprised. He did more, he turned away from those terrible blue eyes that looked him full in the face.

"What is it, my dear? Make haste; I am very busy this afternoon with accounts."

"What made Jesse Vicary change his mind about Mr. Fenner's offer?"

Mr. Kestell's lips parted, as if he were indulging in a silent sigh of relief.

"You seem to interest yourself strangely about that young man, Amice. I don't think it is quite—quite what your mother would like. The reason of his refusing the offer is, however, perfectly simple. I made him see that to refuse was the wisest course."

Amice looked puzzled.

"He did it of his own free will?"

"Certainly."

"He was very unhappy about it. Papa, I saw him that evening, and I shall never forget his face. It seems to haunt me wherever I go; and I can not help fancying that, somehow or other, we are to blame for it. Oh, I don't know how; but you know—you know. Papa, don't look like that! Forgive me if I am saying something wrong. If I am wrong I am punished."

Mr. Kestell did not understand Amice's meaning in the least; but he gave her words an interpretation of his own. He looked round to see if his wife was near, or if any servant was about; but no one was there, and he began walking down the steps so as to draw her away from the house. This had the desired effect. Amice followed him down the drive, through the gate, and along the road by the Pools.

"You saw Vicary the last evening he was here," said Mr. Kestell, very slowly; "and pray what did he say to you? Why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because I was afraid to speak—" Amice turned away her head, and added, almost under her breath: "It is dreadful to be always afraid."

"Afraid of what?" said Mr. Kestell.

He did not lose his temper; he was very gentle, for he feared to frighten Amice before hearing all she had to say.

"Afraid of the cry of the fatherless, which goes straight up to heaven. It is powerful, so very powerful."

Mr. Kestell paused close by the pool, whose dark waters, at the upper end, seemed to reflect nothing of heaven. The water had a strange fascination for him; it attracted him as fire attracts and paralyzes animals. Sometimes he appeared not to be able to move away from it. He seemed to be saying Amice's last words over to himself, as if to take in their meaning. The two formed a strange picture in the stillness of the afternoon. All was so motionless round them, all except the minds of the father and daughter. Suddenly Mr. Kestell recovered himself as he turned away from the water and grasped his daughter's arm firmly.

"Amice, you have somehow got distorted notions about the truth. Why you should suddenly develop this suspicion about me I know not. I should be very glad indeed to set your mind at rest on the subject of Jesse Vicary, if that were possible. Write to him yourself, and ask him any question you please. I think you will find that I have honestly tried to do the best I could for him. I gave in about this offer of Mr. Fenner, for fear he should mistake my intentions. As to Symee's movements, can not you see yourself that it would hardly be kind to let the poor girl share a very small income? Now, Amice, what else are you afraid of? Such ridiculous nonsense as you talk is very—displeasing to me. I never find Elva setting you such an example."

Mr. Kestell paused, and this time it was his turn to look straight at Amice, and to see what effect his words had upon her. On her side, Amice only appeared frightened and disturbed. She passed her hand over her forehead as if to clear her ideas. Evidently, when she spoke, her mood had changed; she was now deeply contrite.

"Papa, forgive me. I can't explain this feeling which comes over me. There, it is gone now; perhaps your explanation will send it away forever. Oh, I hope so; I hope so!"

"What do you mean, child? Are you mad?"

Mr. Kestell would not be mollified by his child's evident distress. The two were alone, quite alone, so he could afford for once to speak his mind.

"I hope not; I hope not. I can't be mad; though I sometimes ask myself if this may not be the case. It is so difficult to judge, so difficult. If only I could tell you everything; but you would be angry."

"Tell me everything!"

Amice shook her head.

"It is gone now. There, papa, will you forgive me? I can't think why I dare question you like that. You must be the best judge. I know you will be fair in all your dealings with Symee and her brother. Haven't you been their best friend always? They have both told me so."

"Very well, then, pray remember this, my dear, don't let us hear of this ridiculous nonsense any more. I will think the case over again, and see if I can in any way help Vicary further. He fancies his present work distasteful to him; he may like to change it. I will think it all over again. And now, dear, go off to your business, and remember, Amice, never mention a word of all this to your mother; it would distress her very much."

Amice seemed gradually to recover her presence of mind; her blue eyes filled with tears; and she heaved a little sigh of relief.

"I hope it will be the last time I shall vex you, papa, I do really hope so. I am so glad you spoke quite plainly to me."

Amice turned away, and disappeared quickly with a brighter, firmer step than usual, and Mr. Kestell walked on slowly along the road leading by the Pools.

Everything was still and quiet, save for the sounds of

Nature. A moor-hen now and then splashed along the reeds; the birds, especially the robins, sung songs to the departing year, and showed great pleasure in nipping a stout worm in two; beneath the cloak of song and beauty there is much cruelty—as we are apt to understand the word.

Every step in the law of Nature seems attended with something which revolts our higher nature. Is it that our higher nature sees but very imperfectly? or is it that Nature has no affinity with spirit, and can not be made to follow the same rules?

Mr. Kestell watched the robin intently till he had finished both halves of his worm, and had returned to his bough to sing a jubilant thanksgiving for his supper. With the spirit of a lawyer he even wondered which best deserved to suffer. Anyhow, it was the robin that received the praise and the good dinner; only morbid enthusiasts would waste their pity on the worm. Then he drew an analogy, which he did not put into words.

"What nonsense!" he said to himself, walking on more briskly. "Analogies constantly fail; they are bound to fail; there are no such things. But this very precaution I took has added to the danger. So Hoel Fenner thinks it strange. But no, he is too much on his own side to wander into the unknown. And Amice! Good God! sometimes I fancy that girl has second-sight; and yet that is impossible. Scotch blood—nonsense! Her grandmother was Scotch. But I don't believe in such things. I expect she is naturally tender-hearted, and she was upset by meeting Vicary. I have done my best for him—my very best. His education cost me every penny of that money. I have kept nothing of it—not a penny. The law is plainly on my side. I—I— Good heavens!"

Mr. Kestell leaned against the trunk of an old oak-tree, whose leaves fell slowly and very occasionally to the earth.

"Not yet, not yet—it has been safe so long—not yet. Elva must be happy—must be. My darling must never know—never; anything to prevent that—anything or everything."

CHAPTER II.

AN ACCIDENT ON THE LINE.

"MISS KESTELL is waiting in the carriage," remarked the porter at Greystone Station.

"She's waiting for the down-train, for the gennelman as came last Saturday," said the other porter, with the decided tone of a man who has a good memory and knows how to use it.

"Eh?" said the first speaker, who never looked at anything attentively, unless it was luggage properly labeled.

It was in the midst of this quiet, lazy fashion of proceeding that a whirlwind of excitement broke over the little country station, and, like the unforeseen storm, no one knew how it had first been felt.

"An accident on the line!" Every one seemed to know it at once without exactly asking or being told. "It's the down-train; just outside Rigby's Tunnel. Three carriages gone off the rails. Everybody killed? No; ten dead, and all wounded. How was it smashed up? A carriage came uncoupled, dragged some more along with it down an embankment. Greystone doctor required, and help at once."

How much of all this Elva heard or understood she could not remember afterward, but it all flashed suddenly upon her when the groom, regardless of all that was right and dignified, rushed into the station to find out; and when the porter with a good memory came rushing past her to fetch some one.

Elva's heart seemed for a moment to stop beating; then, as the groom came back pale and excited with the news, all the blood rushed back to Miss Kestell's face.

"Rigby's Tunnel; it's only three miles off. Quick, Ben! I'll drive on. We might help, if—with—"

She was afraid somebody would stop her; and she felt she must go. Suppose Hoel Fenner was— No, not that —not that; Hoel, so clever, so wonderful—not that; it could not be. She whipped the ponies fiercely, and they trotted off. There was no engine at Greystone to send, but several men had already started off running along the rails, knowing all the other trains were stopped. A dog-cart which had been waiting near to Elva also took the road

to Rigby's Tunnel. Altogether it was a curious experience of wild excitement, and with no time to express it in. Elva only had one aim in view—to get there as quickly as possible, and to know the truth. Hoel's wonderful personality suddenly assumed quite different proportions in her eyes; her heart beat strong and quick. At this moment she felt that the knowledge of his danger had altered her whole view of him. He might be killed just because he had been coming in this train, and coming to see her! Loving her might be his death-blow.

The dog-cart in front of her suddenly drew up as Dr. Pink, the parish doctor, came running out of a small house. The news had reached him, and he seized the first opportunity that presented itself of driving to the scene of action. This delay gave Elva the start; and now, regardless of the correct speed at which a lady should drive, she whipped up the ponies, and made them go quicker than they had ever gone before. Never had she gone the distance in such a short time. Now she was within sight of the spot, and, though for a moment her eyes became dim from fear and excitement, she noticed that already a crowd had collected; that there were several heaps of broken *débris;* and that the crowd was thickest at the bottom of the small embankment.

Elva never once thought of herself. She pulled up the ponies, threw the reins to the groom, and ran to the spot.

"The doctor is coming; he is close behind me. Where are the wounded—the—" She could not say those who are killed.

She spoke in vain, however; it was not easy to get through the crowd. The guard and several gentlemen were trying to keep people off.

"They're working hard at rescuing. You see some of them," said an old man near to her.

"The doctor is here," said Elva again, and this time the word acted like a talisman; for when Dr. Pink jumped down from the dog-cart every one made way for him; and Elva, following close behind, was able to get near to the scene of the accident. Now she paused and saw how little she could do. Only the men could work among that mass of broken wood-work; and she saw that she was in a crowd of frightened women and children, most of whom were unharmed passengers from the unfortunate train.

All at once her heart gave a leap of intense joy and relief. There was Hoel himself, working with the rest. He was safe, thank Heaven! It seemed like an answer to prayer. She saw him pulling away *débris*, going on his knees to lift something, then carrying it away with the help of two or three more men. Something— The crowd told her what it was. "It's a poor lady. They say she's dead, or fainted."

Elva could not keep quiet now. She broke through the crowd, and hurried to the foot of the embankment, meeting Hoel face to face as he was hurrying back. Their hands met; there seemed to be no power of words, save about the suffering.

"The doctor is seeing to her; go and help him. She is a third-class passenger, but a lady, I am sure. I must go back; there are others."

"You are not hurt?" she said, and her eyes, meeting his, said much more. Hoel felt the look, though he did not stop for more than a shake of his head, while Elva went on toward the little group which surrounded the lady.

"Doctor Pink, can I do anything? Is she alive?"

Dr. Pink knew Elva well. He looked up, glad to see a lady.

"Thank you, Miss Kestell. Your handkerchief, please; and kindly come and hold this lady's head. I think she has fainted."

Elva did as she was bid, though not without a little shudder as she saw that the doctor was binding up a crushed hand. It was a sight too terrible to look at; so she looked away, determined to do as she was bid, and not give away to her feelings.

The worst was that the accident had taken place in a country spot, with hardly a cottage in sight, and no restoratives at hand except such as the passengers could provide.

"Are there many buried?" asked Elva, as, though she strained her eyes to see Hoel, she was just out of sight of the *débris*.

"Ten in all, we fear."

"Doctor Pink—here, you are wanted. Here's a man who must be attended to at once."

Another doctor had arrived now, and there was a case

of immediate amputation, so that Elva was left in charge of the lady.

"I must go, Miss Kestall. Here's a drop of brandy in this flask; moisten her lips. Except for the hand, I see no other injury. It may be merely a faint. Do your best. I must go to this other case."

Elva nodded, and, looking up, saw Hoel once again helping to bear a burden. There was a cattle shed in the field close by. She saw that the party went there. She dared not look further.

"A man's true nature comes out in an emergency," she thought, as she bathed her patient's face; "and I—I fancied he was only a literary man. I see I was wrong."

Presently she found all her thoughts were required for her patient, who suddenly opened her eyes, and, gradually recovering consciousness of what had happened, began to cry.

A shout from a little crowd was the next thing that Elva remembered.

"Take care, take care!" Merciful heavens! the top has fallen in!"

Elva had now a few people round her and the sufferer, and, as this last was slowly recovering, she rose up and took a few steps down the path to see what was causing the new excitement. She noticed that a huge mass of *débris*, which had been lying on the edge of the embankment, had now begun to slip. She saw that Hoel, who had returned at that moment, could not avoid the spot. A great bar struck him, and he was completely knocked over. With a cry of horror, Elva bounded forward; nor could she be stopped by several men, who called out to her not to go on.

"Stop, ma'am; you mustn't go that way. It's not safe yet."

"I must go. That gentleman—is he hurt?"

With the agility born of the free, out-of-door life she had led, Elva climbed the steep bank, determined to get round that way. At the top, however, her passage was again barred.

"Miss Kestell—Elva, this is madness," said a low, harsh voice. "Why are you here?"

It was Walter Akister, and Elva felt indignant at the very fact of his being on the spot at all at this moment.

"Mr. Fenner has just met with an accident. I must go and see if he is hurt. Let me go by."

Alva spoke haughtily, and almost passionately.

Walter Akister did not seem to heed her words. He grasped her arms to prevent her progress.

"How can you go into danger like this when there are so many real sufferers to attend to? Wait here, I will go and find out what you want to know."

Mr. Akister's words were further strengthened by an official, who spoke with authority:

"You can't pass here, ma'am. There has been another fall of rubbish. If you want to get past you must go down the embankment and round that meadow. We can't have females here."

Perhaps Walter himself might not have been allowed to go by had he asked leave. As it was, he had safely passed the dangerous portion of road-way while the official was speaking to Elva. She saw him running down the embankment on the other side.

She was not going to be ordered, however, or entirely thwarted. She had had too much her own way all her life long. Quickly she turned back, ran lightly down the embankment, and hurried over a gate into a meadow to make the desired circuit. It was five minutes' walking. She never paused, but hurried on, her eyes eagerly straining to catch a sight of Hoel.

At last she reached the gate; several persons were leaning against it.

"Let me go by, please," she said. "Tell me, is that gentleman much hurt who was knocked down? Where have they taken him?"

"There's a sight of people hurt," was the useless answer, and Elva hurried on toward the shed.

Happily for her, Hoel was not inside; and just outside she saw first Walter Akister, then Dr. Pink. They were bending over somebody, but that somebody was sitting on some sawn wood. She at once recognized Hoel Fenner.

"Mr. Fenner, are you hurt?"

Hoel was pale, but there was actually a smile on his face.

"Nothing at all to signify; only my arm broken. It's set already; but I'm afraid I'm useless now—eh, Doctor Pink? Mr. Akister, will you take my place? There's only one more unfortunate to extricate."

Walter looked at Elva. He must have seen the tell-tale expression; then, without a word, he walked away to take Hoel's place; but certainly Miss Kestell never watched his efforts.

"Your carriage is here, I see, Miss Kestell," said Dr. Pink, hurriedly. "Take Mr. Fenner home. I advise his going to bed at once; and I'll come round as soon as ever I can."

"Yes, I suppose I must," said Hoel; "but I'm sorry not to see the end."

"I'm sure, sir," said a railway man who had come to inquire, "you've done wonders. I'm sorry that 'ere rubbish took to falling so unexpectedly like. The passengers wishes me to express their thanks to you."

Hoel waved his uninjured left hand, and tried to rise. Every one dispersed then to help greater sufferers, and Elva said, gently, and a little shyly:

"Will you take my arm?"

Hoel did so. It was the sweetest moment in his life, he thought. But it was only for a few steps he accepted the offer. He would not let Elva fancy he was taking advantage of her because the situation was interesting.

Just before they drove off, Dr. Pink brought a slip of paper to Elva.

"Will you leave this with Daulington at Greystone, and tell him to send this stuff at once?"

"It's a bad case, I fear," this Hoel, "and I might have been in the same circumstance."

"Poor fellow; the amputation was the only chance, and I fear he will sink. Mind you rest. Miss Kestell, I must make you responsible for this patient."

Elva nodded her head and drove off carefully. The groom was behind them, so nothing of importance could be said, which was as well for Hoel, for, now he was away from the scene of the accident, he felt a good deal stunned, and he lay back in the carriage and closed his eyes. Elva's heart was too full to say much; and also, now that the excitement and the danger were over, she was not so willing to show what she had gone through.

"Who was the one remaining?" she asked, presently. "Has he been suffering all this time?"

"No I don't think he's suffering much; but he's blocked in in a most peculiar way. I went once or twice to see

what I could do for him; but, seeing he was pretty cheerful, we left him. I think he said his name was Button, and bound for Greystone. He and I were the only passengers for Greystone, so I felt an interest in him; but he said that he was pretty comfortable, and we were to see to the others. He can't move hand or foot, and it seems a miracle he's alive."

"Button? I seem to know the name. I dare say papa will know. He knows the Greystone people better than we do, of course."

"So you drove on when you heard," said Hoel, in a low voice. "I was so much afraid you would—suffer or be hurt by these painful scenes."

"I shall always be glad I came," said Elva. "But you ought not to talk. Am I shaking you? Still, the sooner we are home the better."

"I am quite satisfied with my present circumstances," said Hoel, in his bright way, and yet Elva could not doubt that from his tone the words were true.

She blushed deeply; she could not find a repartee as usual. The injured arm, now in an extemporized sling, occasionally touched her, and seemed to send a strange thrill of pride through her. Courage in a man has the same magic effect on a woman as the exhibition of womanly tenderness to a man. The highest development of the special attribute of the sex often deceives the opposite gender. A man often does not fully realize that a courageous woman may be infinitely better than one who is easily moved by the sorrow of others; and a woman glorying in the hero, whose courage is palpable, forgets that a lion-hearted man can be very selfish; may, in fact, make a very bad husband.

It was getting dusk when the ponies drove up to Rushbrook House, and the hero of the day walked into the hall, preceded by Elva. At the same moment Mr. Kestell hurried in, having only just heard of the accident.

"My darling," he said, quickly, "thank Heaven you are back with Mr. Fenner. I've only just heard. Don't go into the drawing-room and startle your mother, dear. I will prepare her. Mr. Fenner, what can we get for you? Jones is a capital nurse."

"Don't agitate yourself, dear old dad," laughed Elva, now quite herself, after the refreshing drive. "Mr. Fen-

ner is not very bad, and nearly all the poor people are extricated now. Where is Amice?"

"Not come in yet. I am glad you are not too much upset. Yes, that is right. Doctor Pink will come in, I conclude."

"Yes, poor man, if he can. He will have his hands full. Doctor Roberts and another man are there."

Elva went upstairs, and Jones and Mr. Fenner followed.

"If you prefer coming down, you can lie on the library sofa," she said, and then went into her own room.

She looked into her glass and saw how excited she was; how brightly her eyes shone. She locked her door, and walked up and down, thinking deeply of Hoel. Then, stopping short, she knelt down and laid her head on a chair, and sobbed.

"I am sure now, Hoel. Hoel, I love you," she sobbed. "For better for worse, you are my hero."

The tears were not all happiness. For such a child of freedom as she was, with the love and joy came a feeling of curious regret; for, to love means a great deal of unselfishness, a great deal of giving up of self, and Elva had never yet understood this.

It was an hour later when she softly opened the library door. Jones and her father had been most kind, and had done all that could be done till the doctor came again. Mr. Kestell wanted to telegraph to London, but Hoel would not hear of it. And now he had begged to see Elva for a few moments.

There seemed to his attentive ears a change in her footstep as she entered. Hoel was lying down on the sofa, covered with rugs. His head had begun to ache a little, and he felt tired out.

There was a shaded lamp put near to the invalid, and, sitting up, he saw Elva coming softly toward him. He thought at that moment she was the most beautiful woman on earth.

"How good of you!" he said, trying to speak as usual, though his voice shook a little. "I expect Doctor Pink will turn up soon, and then I may be exiled upstairs. I wanted to thank you for all you did this afternoon."

Elva sat down in a chair close by; her limbs trembled; and she looked away.

"Don't thank me," she said, trying to speak firmly.

"I was so—so afraid for you, that I was obliged to come on. I thought you might have been killed—coming here. I should have been so miserable, as if it were my fault. And instead of that—I— Mr. Fenner, may I say something? I never believed in you enough. I know now that a critic can be a hero as well."

Elva never gave in in a half-way; she was not cautious or calculating.

Hoel's heart beat high now; but he was very anxious to be truly just toward the woman he loved.

"You mustn't think that a mere thing like that makes any difference. Remember, I'm the same Hoel whom you were doubtful about coming for yesterday."

"No, you are not," said Elva, slipping down, and kneeling by the sofa; "you are infinitely a greater, nobler man than I fancied. And—will you forgive me for having doubted it?"

Hoel forgot all about his desperate fatigue, forgot everything but Elva now, and sat up. He had only his left hand to offer, and this very act exhibiting his unusual state of helplessness, touched the woman's heart. Hoel, before this, had wanted just that touch of helplessness which fascinates a woman.

"Don't move," she said, taking his hand in both hers with the tenderness of a mother. "I won't allow it. I wanted only to say one thing."

Hoel looked at her now; there was no mistaking his love and admiration.

"What?" he said, hoarsely; all the tumult and the excitement of the afternoon seemed to return tenfold.

"You won't be able to use your right hand for a long time. Let me be your right hand."

"Do you mean it?—not now, only, but always?" he said, hardly able to bear this scene.

"Always," she whispered, hiding her face on his arm—"always, till death part us."

He jumped up now, nothing could keep him there. He stood up to his full height, and put his left arm round her, so that her head lay on his shoulder, and he kissed her passionately.

"Do you really mean it? Say it again. Elva, say 'Hoel, I love you.'"

"Hoel, I love you." And she added: "My hero."

CHAPTER III.

WORTHLESS PAPERS.

ELVA walked upstairs as if she were treading upon golden clouds which were wafting her to heaven. The dressing-bell had just rung as Dr. Pink entered, and the happy girl fled. Her first thought was for Amice, whom she found sitting by the window of her room. There was no moon, only darkness in the sky, and a few stars shining between gathering clouds.

Elva went and threw herself on the ground beside her, and for once did not notice anything in her sister's face.

"Amice darling, kiss me, wish me joy. It has all come upon me to-day; before I was always hesitating. I did not know if I cared enough, or if I could believe enough in him; but it is so different now. You should have seen him this afternoon; never one thought of himself. Amice, I saw then what a silly thing I had been to have had any doubt about him. Amice, Amice, this is life, this is happiness, if only I could hope you would some day have the same."

Amice took both her sister's hands and gazed into her face; the large, blue eyes had a strange, far-away expression that suddenly startled even Elva, who was used to Amice's curious ways.

"Amice, what is it? Why are you so grave, so sad to-night, when I am, oh! so happy, that I can't find words for it? I suppose papa will go and help him? I wish I might. I can't bear the idea that they will hurt him. I never knew what love meant before. When it comes, dear Amice, there is no mistaking it. But even now I feel so miserable at the idea; he might have been killed, and then I should never have realized my loss. Isn't it foolish of me?"

"Do you love him very much?" said Amice, at last. "I knew that would come. If he were quite worthy of you, then I should be happier."

"Quite worthy of me. Now, you dear, gloomy child, don't utter such stupid fancies. But you did not see him as I did. If he had not been ordered off, he would have stayed to help the last poor unfortunate sufferer. Oh, I

wonder how he ever got out? How horridly unfeeling one is when one is happy one's self. Fancy, Amice, Walter Akister was there; that was the only thing I did not like. I really think he must have the evil eye; he looked so angry when he saw me coming toward Hoel. I am glad Hoel is my first, my only love. I have never cared a bit about any one else, have I? I wonder if we shall quarrel? If we do, I know I shall give in; and yet that's quite unlike me. Amice, I never knew before that love does change one entirely; it makes one's whole character different. How strange!"

"Is papa glad?" asked Amice, laying her head on her sister's shoulder. "Dear Elva, I made him angry this afternoon—really angry. See!"

Amice drew up her sleeve a little, and showed a little red mark. Elva looked at it, and felt strangely afraid that her sister really was not quite like other people.

"Amice, what are you saying? What nonsense. Papa never in all his life was rough to any one, and least of all to one of us!"

Amice hastily pulled down her sleeve again, and was silent; and Elva thought it wiser to take no more notice of the incident.

"I wish I were already Hoel's wife," she said, "because then I could do all his writing for him. Now, I do hope he will stay here till he is well. I must dress. What color does he care most about? I am sure I don't know. There's a carriage driven up. Oh, dear! it's the squire and his wife; it is merely curiosity that has brought them. Symee, quick! Let me put on my velvet gown. I must go and receive them. Mamma is upstairs; and you look like a ghost, Amice."

In a very few minutes Elva hastened to receive the Eagle Bennisons, who, having heard of the accident, and garbled accounts about Mr. Fenner, came at once to see if they could help. Mrs. Eagle Bennison alternately smiled and looked pathetically grave.

"My sweet child. Yes, we have heard; so sad. Poor Mr. Fenner! and I fancied—"

Elva was not going to live through a string of innuendoes. She boldly spoke out after the squire had added:

"Does Doctor Pink think there is any hope?"

"Oh, dear, whatever have you heard? Not the truth,

certainly. Mr. Fenner was coming to stay here for the Sunday—"

"As he had done several times already," smiled Mrs. Eagle Bennison.

"Yes, and he was in the train that met with the accident, but he was not hurt at all. Only when he was doing wonders toward recuing the poor people who were many of them jammed in, some *débris* fell on him, and his arm was broken; but it is nothing serious, only, of course, very inconvenient."

"Really, is that so; but perhaps he won't mind much being an invalid in this charming society," said Mrs. Eagle Bennison.

"I hope he won't, considering we are engaged to each other," said Elva, quickly, and very decidedly.

"My dear child! How very interesting! Well, really—John, do you hear? Do wish your favorite joy. Now, darling, I must kiss you. Such a talented young man! I feel it is all my doing. You met him first the evening of the dinner-party at our house."

"And your father, what does he think?" asked the squire, kindly.

"Papa is not likely to object to my choice; and, besides, everybody likes and admires Mr. Fenner. I think I am—"

No, Elva would say no more; Mrs. Eagle Bennison was such a gossip.

"Well, really, now, won't George be interested! He made me believe that a certain Walter Akister was to be the lucky man. Even the accident quite pales in interest when compared with such a romantic ending to it. I wish I had known sooner. We had a meeting of the T. A. P. S., and our committee would have been so much interested. Dear Miss Heaton was only to-day speaking to me against matrimony. She says clergy oughtn't to marry; but, of course, critics—that is quite another thing. Don't begin to write stories, though, Elva dear; for your husband will be bound to praise you against his will."

Elva blushed, and thought Mrs. Eagle Bennison more odious than ever before; but happily, at this moment, Mr. Kestell himself entered the room. He looked as pale and agitated as if he himself had witnessed the accident.

"So your guest is not killed," said the squire. "Really,

how stories get exaggerated! Guthrie declared there was not a word true, and would not trouble himself to accompany us, so he has missed quite a startling piece of news!"

"Yes, my dear Mr. Kestell, let me wish you every happiness for this dear child. Little sly puss, not to tell us before!"

"Papa, Mrs. Eagle Bennison means that she is very much surprised that such a famous man is engaged to such a very unknown person as your daughter! What does Doctor Pink say?"

Mr. Kestell received the congratulation with his usual courtly politeness. He even looked much gratified as he placed his hand on his daughter's shoulder.

"The young ones soon forsake the nest nowadays, Mr. Bennison; but I only wish to consult their happiness. I have long ago decided it is best to give in to their fads and fancies."

"Well, you are a good father! and so there is no anxiety about your patient?"

Dr. Pink now entered and answered for Mr. Kestell.

"None at all; but I have sent him to bed. To-morrow he can do as he likes. The splints must not be moved; but at his age it will be but a short affair."

The accident was of course rehearsed, and then Elva asked the doctor:

"Was that poor man hurt when he was at last extricated?"

"No; not overmuch; but he'll be laid up at Greystone for some time. There is a rib broken; but I hope that is all. A marvelous escape! By the way, Mr. Kestell, when asked about his whereabouts the man gave the name of Joe Button, and said he was on his way to see you."

"Joe Button?" said Mr. Kestell, slowly.

"Yes, that was his name. He's gone to the Three Feathers. I told him I would ask you what you knew of him."

"Ah, yes; thank you. I'm afraid the poor fellow must be hard up for cash if he came to see me. He was once employed by me in—in the North. Thank you; I will go and see him."

"Well, don't let him sponge upon you," laughed Dr. Pink; "the company is bound to pay the doctors' bills of these poor people. Now I must go back. I expect I shall

be up all night; but I'm glad your patient will cause you no anxiety. A very simple case indeed."

Mr. Kestell followed the doctor to the door, and the Eagle Bennisons soon took their leave, the squire saying that he should drive on to Greystone, and see if he could be of any service to any of the sufferers. Left to his own devices, the squire was as tender-hearted as a woman; but he had his spouse to reckon with.

"Good-bye, dear Elva," said this lady; "come and tell me all about it to-morrow. I do love young people, you know; and an engagement is quite an excitement in poor out-of-the-way Rushbrook."

Everything was disorganized to-day; for when dinner was announced, Amice sent down word that she would stay up with her mother, who wanted to hear about the accident. Elva was restless and excited, and Mr. Kestell rather silent till the servants left the room. Then father and daughter were once more alone.

"Dear old dad, I suppose I have given in now, and I thought once I never should. I hope he will be able to stay here some time. Papa, say you like him very, very much, or we shall disagree."

How different this daughter was from the other, thought Mr. Kestell, as he looked up with rather a sad smile.

"Would anything or anybody turn you against your old father, Elva?"

"No," she answered, with flashing eyes, "of course not. Not even Hoel! But you do like him?"

"Of course. Don't imagine anything to the contrary, my dear! By the way, I looked in just now, and Fenner was going off to sleep. Jones quite enjoys an invalid, he tells me."

"I have always wanted you to have a son, papa; and now you will really have one."

"One who wants to rob me of a daughter!"

"Not really; we shall be here often, very often; we shall always be running down. I hate London, you know. Oh, I am a country bird, and shall never be a town sparrow; but I shall be a help to him, for, after all, you know, papa, women do see things rather all round, or else they see one side very clearly, and either of these things is useful to the lords of creation, who take such a time to turn round on their own axis!"

"You impudent girl! You must go to bed early, and rest after such a day. I think I shall order the carriage and go to Greystone. The squire shames me into action."

"You, papa! At this time of night; why, it is past eight o'clock!"

"Yes; but this Joe Button may be penniless. He used to work for me, and I pensioned him; but I fear he drinks all the money before he gets it. Poor wretch!"

"The fellow ought not to have been coming down to beg of you, papa, when you are so kind. You spoil everybody."

"So that you are happy, darling, nothing matters."

"Papa, you are always good to me. Sometimes I wonder how I can leave you. It seems as if I couldn't realize that part."

There was a sob in Elva's voice.

"No, no, not more good than you deserve. You, at least, have never given me anxiety."

The emphasis on "you" made Elva suddenly recall Amice's words. One glance at her father's face made her feel sure he could not be harsh. But she would make herself certain of the fact.

"Papa, what is the matter with dear old Amice just now? She has such queer fancies. Actually, she says you are angry with her, and believes you made a mark on her arm!"

Elva laughed to hide a feeling of shame she had at even mentioning such a thing.

"No, it must be fancy. Don't believe anything she tells you. I have myself noticed how curiously fanciful she is; it rather distresses me; in fact, if it could be managed, Amice ought to go away for change of air."

Elva was relieved, and yet also perplexed and distressed for her sister's sake. She had seen the mark. Then who had made it?

"That would be no use; she would never leave home without me."

"Then could you not, both of you, go away a little, and take Symee with you?"

"Oh, papa! not now of course—oh, no. Don't take any notice of Amice; she is so horribly shy sometimes, even of you."

"Very well; I only suggested it; I don't know why.

Of course you could not leave home just now, and the winter is coming on. We must try in the spring, before your wedding, to go to Paris. But what will Fenner say? He may want you at Christmas, perhaps. A little Christmas gift. Well, well, we shall see. No, everything must go on as usual."

Elva had lost herself in a dream of happiness, and did not notice her father's changing mood. Nothing was really as usual to-day.

When she rose to go, her father kissed her good-night.

"Go to bed, child. I shall go upstairs and see your mother, and then drive to Greystone. Don't tell her or any one; she is so easily made nervous. I shall be late, I dare say."

Elva put her arms round his neck. She was nearly as tall as he was, and she could lay her cheek near to his.

"Papa, thank you a hundred times for all your goodness about Hoel. You did exactly what was right; you gave me time to be sure; and now I am sure. I do believe it was all your doing. Say, God bless you."

Mr. Kestell kissed the soft cheek in silence, and so tender and long was the kiss that Elva forgot the omission of the words, for, at that moment Amice opened the door and said that Mrs. Kestell wanted to see Elva. She did not enter the room, and Elva, remembering her curious ideas, went hastily away with her. After this, Mr. Kestell rang the bell and ordered the carriage to come round.

"Mr. Fenner sent you a message, Elva. He begged you would go to bed early and rest, and said you were not to worry about him, as he felt quite comfortable," said Amice.

"I won't worry; why should I? I am so happy. Now I will go and tell mother a very little outline of the whole afternoon, and then go to bed."

"I will sit up then, in case anything is wanted. I shall tell Jones I shall be in the morning-room. He will sit up with Mr. Fenner."

"You must call him Hoel now," said Elva, laughing; and then the happy girl went to see her mother, and afterward to bed.

Greystone was still in a state of excitement over the railway accident; but as the night was dark, it was chiefly in

the public-houses that the common people discussed it. At the Three Feathers, especially, the topic was interesting, as, upstairs, lay one of the sufferers. When Mr. Kestell's carriage stopped at the door, the innkeeper felt decidedly elated, and came forward with alacrity to speak to the gentleman. Every one knew Kestell of Greystone's carriage; had it not been a daily sight these many years past? Mr. Kestell himself looked rather more smiling and kind than usual when he inquired after the sufferer.

"I hear a certain Joseph Button is laid up here. Poor man, I know something of him, and would like to see him if this is possible. Doctor Pink told me he could be found here."

"Yes, sir; will you walk up, sir? A most unfortunate accident. They say there are ten in Greystone to-night unable to move; but the rest have gone on to their friends. The man you speak of is rather easier now, thank you, sir."

"I am very glad to hear that. Yes, I will see him. Did he have any luggage?"

"Just a bag, sir, which has only been brought here half an hour ago. Come up the private stairs, sir. Betty, show Mr. Kestell up to the room where the injured man is."

The landlord touched his forelock and returned to the bar, leaving Mr. Kestell to Betty, his wife. Mr. Kestell walked slowly up the steep stairs, for the Three Feathers was an old house. Betty Stevens, with many courtesies and much whispered advice, opened the door, and ushered Mr. Kestell into the sick man's room.

"Mr. Button, here's a kind gentleman come to see you. The doctor said he wasn't to speak much, sir; but a few words cheers a body up wonderful, I think, sir."

Mr. Kestell took no heed of the doctor's orders, or, at all events, he did not apologize further than by saying:

"I merely wish to say a few words to the invalid. I shall not detain—I mean, I do not wish to tire him."

"It's Mr. Kestell," said Joe Button, not being able to do more than turn his head round. "Well, sir, that is kind of you; but, begging your pardon, sir, it's d—"

"Mr. Button, don't swear, please. I'm truly sorry to see you in this difficulty. Why did you leave London?"

"Well, sir, being hard up, I thought— You see, I

lately talked to a young fellow, you know, called Vicary, and he said as how you were very kind. In fact, I've come to live in the country."

"Is that all?"

"Well, yes, sir. I thought the nearer I could be to you the better. When a poor devil has been a gentleman, as you might say, why, it's rather hard for him to find himself near cleared out."

Mr. Kestell took a sovereign from his pocket.

"The company will pay all your expenses, I fancy; but take this for the present."

Joe reached out his right hand and took it. It was one of his left ribs that was broken.

"Don't let yourself be robbed," said Mr. Kestell. Then, correcting himself, he added: "I only mean—of course—in these places—"

"Don't you fear, sir; I'm sharp enough. Besides, my property won't tempt people. I was bringing down my old papers to show you, sir, and see if you could not do something for me. When a man's been in better positions, it's hard to come down to being as I am."

"Through your own fault, Button, entirely your own fault. I found you living in a cottage, paying rent to— I forget now all the transactions; but your father sold the land, and then you felt hurt afterward that you did not know it was valauble."

"It was my father's obstinacy, sir. I was too young to make him listen to me. I said often that I fancied it might be valuable, but he was never for doing anything but drink; and so, being rather short of funds, he sold it to a gentleman."

"Land changes hands very quickly at times. You never saw the gentleman who was said to have bought it, did you, Button? I don't think I have ever asked you before; if I have, I have forgotten your answer."

The landlady's footsteps were heard at this moment, and she coughed a little to make her near presence known. Joe Button glanced toward the door. He wanted to ask Mr. Kestell something more than about long-past transactions.

"Yes, sir, I remember his coming once, I think. He was a fine-looking gentleman; quite young and handsome.

The other day I was reminded of him by seeing some one like him. Is he alive, sir?"

"No. I told you before he was dead; but when I came into the property I did all I could for you, Button, feeling sorry for your small means; for, had you been able to keep your land, you would have been well off. But then, again, you would never have had capital enough to work it. Ah! here is your good nurse; I must go."

"Wait a minute, sir; you say the company will pay up, don't you?"

Mr. Kestell smiled at the landlady.

"Don't distress yourself about that; and in the meantime, Mrs. Stevens, you can apply to me for anything that is necessary. Mind you, I don't mean to pay for your special luxury, Button. It would be bad for you—very bad. It might lead to fever, and I know not what other complications. No whisky, Button, eh? However, everything in reason I will advance, and trust to the company to repay me."

"Well, sir, I'm sure that is speaking handsome; and you may trust me, sir. We care for our good name more than for anything else. I often says to my husband, I'd rather starve than serve out drink to a man as is already fuddled, sir. No, there's no one as can say our house isn't respectable; cheerful company, and just enough liquor to help a poor man's bread and cheese to go down easy, sir. That's our principles."

"Very good, very good principles," said Mr. Kestell. "By the way, Button, you said you had some papers you were bringing for my inspection. Perhaps I had better take them now."

Joe Button did not approve of this; but the gold sovereign was firmly glued to his palm. It is difficult to refuse anything to the donor of gold.

"Well, sir, if you'll keep them safe for me, when I get up from this bed, why, I'll come round and claim them again. A man likes to have his papers to show, even if they're not worth much."

"Of course, Button. Well, I think you can trust me. You can have them all back as soon as you like. I will see what can be done for you. Good-night. I hope you will soon be all right; and don't forget moderation."

Mr. Kestell lifted the black bag, and brought it to the bedside.

"Where shall I find them, Button?"

The bag was not locked; the papers lay at the bottom—a good-sized parcel of yellow parchment, and aged letters, tied with red tape.

"I know their number, sir," said Button, suspicious, though he knew his papers were perfectly worthless. "I'll call round for them when I'm well."

Then the poor fellow, tired with the conversation and all he had gone through, turned his head round, and took no more notice of his visitor.

Mr. Kestell spoke a few words to the landlady, a few more to the landlord, and then entered his carriage, still holding the old papers, and told the coachman to drive home.

"He once saw him," he said to himself. "Well, there is no harm in that. Button was a lad himself; and these papers are worthless, utterly worthless; but I can feel for him. If his father had not sold that property, they might have been in a very different position. That is the way fate treats people. If he had lived, it would have been the same; most likely he would never have known. But it is strange that Button should turn up just now—very strange."

CHAPTER IV.

AMICE'S RESOLUTION.

AMICE had a strange liking for being alone in the big house at night. She had no fears of ghosts or apparitions, for the sisters had lived too free and healthy a life from childhood to have foolish fancies. She did not know her father had gone out, as, in all the excitement, Elva had not mentioned it; and she merely wished to remain up in case there was anything wanted for Hoel Fenner, so that Elva might have a good night's rest and feel easy. The morning-room was not so big and lonely as the drawing-room, and, having got a large white shawl to wrap round her, Amice began her vigil by slowly walking up and down to prevent herself getting sleepy.

Jones knew she was here, and Symee, too; but Symee was not strong enough for watching; and Amice always

considered other people before herself, especially she considered Symee.

As she paced to and fro, her mind reverted with painful distinctness to her father's conduct toward her. She even once pulled up her sleeve and looked at the mark to make quite sure that it had not all been a dream. Yet, surely, it must be fancy. He, so gentle, so loving toward Elva, and, usually, toward herself, what could she have done to anger him? She had merely asked about Jesse Vicary. Was that wrong? She remembered so clearly Jesse's face of agony in that lonely wood; she saw, as if still before her, the mute despair of the strong, noble-hearted man whose life she knew so much of from Symee. Some strong sorrow it must have been to have changed his whole expression and his ambition. It could not all have been caused by Symee's refusal to go and live with him. What, then, was it? Could it be anything wrong? Symee knew nothing of it certainly; but then she ought to know it. She ought to go and live with her only relation, and help him.

Tired at last of walking, Amice sat down, and, after a time she folded her hands, and her eyes seemed to see nothing before them. The ardent spirit was, as it were, released from its prison, and soared far away into a region where thought is untranslatable; and thus, for a short period, Amice was happy.

She was roused from her dream by the sound of carriage wheels, and stood up suddenly, wondering what this could mean. Perhaps Mr. Fenner's uncle had heard of his accident, and had come to see him; perhaps some one was soliciting help from them. She listened attentively; she knew Jones had not gone to bed; he would come down and open the door; but she must soon go out and see what help was wanted. Her dream had been so grand, so beautiful, it seemed almost pain to come back to every-day life. But Amice never paused or was turned back from her duty by common difficulties.

Now she listened again. The bell sounded, and, strange, the carriage drove away. Not even yet imagining it could be the home carriage, Amice walked toward the door and opened it. She heard the hall door open, and Jones saying something she could not hear.

"Who could it be?" She felt a little shy. It might be a stranger. Very slowly she walked up the small passage

leading to the central hall. She heard Jones actually walking away again down the passage toward the servants' hall. What had he done with the stranger? Amice paused again, and listened. She heard the study door shut, then open again, and then at last she recognized her father's footstep. He crossed over to the drawing-room; and Amice trembled for fear he should come to the morning-room and find her there.

"I must tell him," she thought, "why I stayed up. It is late. Where has he been? How strange."

She walked softly across the hall, and entered the study, for the door was wide open, and there were two candles burning on the writing-table. Amice tried to feel brave. She was doing no harm; it was her duty to tell her father that she was sitting up. Standing there, she involuntarily cast her eyes on the table and noticed a large bundle of yellow-looking papers lying on the blotting-book; the writing was plain and lawyer-like, and it was easy enough to read:

"Copy of the title-deeds of the property known as Westacre Lands, now in the possession of John Pellew, Esq.
"January 18th, 18—. J. BUTTON."

"Westacre Lands," thought Amice. "That's papa's property in the North. I thought he bought it of some poor people called Button. He often told us they felt themselves injured about it, and that he had to pension off the son. This must have been a former owner."

Amice argued this out, not because she cared about the subject at all, but because she tried to employ her mind till her father should return; she was afraid he might be vexed at finging her still up; and yet her motives had been of the best; it was silly to fear.

Then at last she heard her father's footsteps again coming across from the drawing-room. He must have gone merely to fetch something. Suddenly he entered, and stood one moment transfixed at the sight—at Amice standing there in a white shawl, as if she were an apparition, her immobility and her speechlessness giving Mr. Kestell some cause to believe this was indeed but an appearance, an optical illusion; and it was Amice herself who broke the spell, wondering why her father stood there staring at her in such amazement.

"Papa, I did not know you were out; or that you were

coming in so late. I stayed up to make Elva feel quite easy, in case Mr. Fenner should require anything. Now you are sitting up, perhaps I had better go to bed."

Mr. Kestell had had time to recover his composure during her speech. There was nothing in it to find fault with; indeed, the kind thought and kind action were only what were to be expected from Amice. But, nevertheless, he felt, as most people do, extremely annoyed at having been startled.

Amice, always Amice gliding about and looking at him. It was becoming unbearable.

"Next time, my dear, you make these arrangements, I prefer being told. I had to go to Greystone to see one of the poor sufferers of the accident whose presence was unexpected."

"Joseph Button was it, papa? Mr. Fenner told Elva about him. He is the son of the man you bought Westacre Lands from, isn't he?"

Her eyes unconsciously reverted to the deeds.

"Ah, did he mention it to Fenner?" said Mr. Kestell, coming near his writing-table, and nervously placing his hand on the title-deeds, looking up as he did so at Amice. She glanced again toward her father, and then at the papers, then again at his face. What was the matter? She saw how strangely agitated he looked. Never before had she seen him look like this. His face said plainly: "Have you looked at these?" But his lips did not utter any words.

At this moment Amice felt the strange, terrible feeling come over her—the feeling she hoped not to experience again. The sight of the papers near to her made her visibly shudder. Her father's very presence caused her to shrink away from him, so that, without another word, she walked slowly away, resolved not to be tempted into saying what was on her lips; for quite clearly and quite distinctly she saw the word "guilt" written on his face.

And she was afraid to see more.

Before now she had had the unknown dread and the unexplained shrinking, yet the cause had never appeared; but during these first moments of agony it was not so much his guilt, whatever it might be, that she thought of, but, besides, she now recognized for a certainty that the children were punished for the fathers. What she called the curse, was, in truth, the punishment of the generations. If it

had to descend to the third and fourth, what would be the visitation on the first?

Sobbing, as if she had committed a crime, Amice Kestell knelt near her bed and prayed for forgiveness, forgiveness for she knew not what, merely certain, for the first time in her life, that fair and prosperous as were the outward prospects of the Kestell family, they were walking over a flowery path beneath which a precipice was hidden.

"I must know, I must find out," said Amice, aloud, "there may yet be time for restitution. Why did I not have the courage to ask him then? It was a chance given me, and I was too cowardly to take it. Why must I know it—I, his child, or is it all some frightful temptation of the devil? Am I accusing my father of something which is merely a fancy of my own brain, and yet—" Gradually the fever of her mind abated, and the peace of resignation came over her; but this was not before the morning light broke over the moorland.

Another, and a very different, scene was taking place in the study. When Amice had gone—not stopping even to shut the door—Mr. Kestell stood quite motionless where he was. One hand was on the title-deeds, and his eyes were also fixed on the dirty parchments and papers. The gray hue on his features—which had so much startled Amice, and where she had read the word "guilt"—gave place to a cold perspiration, the effect of intense mental activity or suffering. His lips slightly opened, remained fixed, as did his eyes; only the candles flickered a little as the draught from the open door caught them. It might have been five minutes or more that Mr. Kestell of Greystone stood there. He knew not, and no one heeded; but Nature's great law of movement asserted itself after a time. Mechanically, Mr. Kestell lifted his hand from the papers, and, walking slowly across the room, he shut the door. The sound of this did him good; he breathed more freely; but as he came back, he involuntarily remembered the scene with Jesse Vicary. It flashed vividly before his eyes, just as if it were being rehearsed again—Vicary was standing by the fire-place, insisting on knowing the truth.

"He would have it," murmured Mr. Kestell, feeling himself really alone, now that the door was shut. "He would not let well alone, and those hot-headed fellows mistake one so easily. I never said anything to wound him;

he inferred everything so quickly. Perhaps I had better have let things take another turn; but I could not help it, he forced my hand."

Thus murmuring, as if the sound of his own voice were a relief to him, Mr. Kestell went to a great bureau placed in the corner of his study. The top part consisted of book-shelves covered by glass doors; below, there were three deep drawers. There was a key in the glass doors; but the drawers were not locked. If these contained secrets, then Mr. Kestell did not keep his secrets under lock and key.

Mr. Kestell stooped down and took from the topmost drawer a large blue envelope, which lay, if not quite at the top, at all events, well within easy reach.

Then, going back to his writing-table, he took out the contents of the envelope, and compared them with the papers procured from Button. There was a bundle of private letters, which he put on one side; then some title-deeds, and these he compared with Button's dirty papers. Yes, word for word they were the same; and, in the flowery language of the law, they made over the property, known as Westacre Lands, to John Pellew, Esq., of Dungapore, Madras. To this document was added the original title-deeds of the Buttons, which enumerated the number of fields and their acreage.

It took Mr. Kestell some time to go through these papers and compare them together. He found no flaw in the copies; indeed, he had not expected to find any; but all the same, his keen glance took as much care to detect one as if he had expected it.

Was the wish father of the thought?

"I conclude the Buttons really owned these fields for many years; their title was quite good; otherwise, the whole transaction might have fallen to the ground. Pshaw! title-deeds are, after all, every day found imperfect. If the law were to meddle with half the deeds in England, how many could stand? John Pellew paid a very small sum for the land—four hundred pounds. Merely that; and now it is worth thousands; just because I had capital, and could work it. I paid more than the four hundred, if my bill were required of me. A man can not accuse his conscience of unfairness if he has had a chance to come upon valuable property in the way of ordinary business. I have never

taken even a stick from a hedge without paying for it, never."

This confession of probity seemed gradually to restore Mr. Kestell to a calmer frame of mind. He put up his own documents again into their cover, and replaced them in the drawer; then, tying up Button's bundle, he inclosed all these papers in a large lawyer's envelope, and addressed them to "J. Button." As he sealed it, however, Mr. Kestell thought:

"Perhaps, after all, that poor fellow will never call for them again."

CHAPTER V.

A MAN'S HONOR.

To be only a partial invalid, and yet to be made a great deal of, and to be considered very much of a hero is, even to the most modest and humble of individuals, by no means an unhappy state of affairs. Perhaps the feeling of the greatest unmixed felicity which can be experienced is to be a hero, and to be conscious at the same time of repudiating all attempts at flattery. The highest, or rather the essence of flattery is imbibed when we are openly rejecting the proffered cup; indeed, it may not be altogether paradoxical to say that a very humble man does not reject admiration, because true humility is seldom conscious that praise is being offered.

Hoel Fenner's arm being imprisoned in splints, and supported by a sling, made its owner a decidedly interesting mortal. There were the laurels of the hero round his head, and the myrtle-wreath of the lover on his handsome brows; and, as sometimes happens, the most Cassandra-like prophet could find nothing but blooming flowers for the present, and prospective buds for the future.

Miss Heaton, who had quite a knack of discovering the canker in the rose, peered in vain into Hoel and Elva's flowers to discover it, so she contented herself by saying to her brother:

"Of course, Herbert, though you are so much pleased about this engagement, I very much doubt if it will answer. Elva is such a willful young woman: she will never learn to obey, though, of course, now she is quite dazzled by the prospects of becoming a London lady."

Mr. Heaton was having his tea, and there was a quiet gravity on his face which his sister could not construe into words. Surely it could not possibly mean envy, or a doubt of his own supreme happiness under her kind care.

"Elva Kestell looks very happy; I met her and Mr. Fenner to-day on the Beacon. It is very pretty to see her tenderness coming to the surface."

"It won't last! Girls are so ridiculous when they are engaged; they fancy every one is envying them, and thinking of them."

"I don't think self-consciousness is Elva's failing," smiled the vicar, who, in his quiet way, was a keen observer.

"Well, perhaps not; she does not care enough for public opinion, and neither does her sister. By the way, Herbert, I met that strange girl Amice to-day, and she begged me to ask you if you could give her a few minutes' conversation soon. I do hope you will say you are too busy."

"But I'm not too busy," said the vicar, looking surprised. "Why should I say so?"

Miss Heaton coughed a little to give herself time to find the answer.

"Well, if you once begin a few minutes' conversation with a girl like Amice Kestell, the minutes might grow into hours."

"What, on the same day? That would be indeed serious," the vicar laughed.

"Really, Herbert, that is ridiculous of you! I mean there would be minutes' conversation every day."

"Miss Amice is not given to much speech; sometimes I can not get her to talk at all."

"That is her way, so that she may appear shy," said Miss Heaton, mysteriously.

"Why should she want to appear shy?"

"Really, men are so simple and short-sighted! Don't you understand, Herbert, that Amice thinks you will be taken with those shy manners of hers, and all that cottage-visiting, and sitting up with old women. It all means the same thing."

"I should say it meant a very kind heart."

"Of course you would say so. A man is so easily taken in. Why, a blind bat would see further than you do."

Poor Herbert, he felt that he was paying dearly for having been asked for a few minutes' conversation.

"When did she want to see me?"

"After the Sunday-school; but I have asked Mr. Fenner and Elva to come in then. You really must not be rude to them."

"No one is ever rude to lovers, my dear, except those who keep them from each other. Well, I must be off to night-school. I mean to try this year again, and, after that, if my roughs won't appreciate their advantages they shall have no more of my pearls. By the way, you know Miss Grey can't come this year, because of the walk back. She says it was too much for her last year, and yet she looks well enough."

Miss Heaton was, this time, very glad her brother was so simple. Miss Grey had lately become too attentive in the way of working slippers "for the dear vicar," and she had had a delicate hint that he required no more worsted work.

"I expect her aunt wants her company at home. I only wish Amice had as careful a parent; but really Mrs. Kestell is quite a useless member of society, and never looks after her daughters."

"I rather imagine that there are no such creatures as useless members of society," replied the vicar, thoughtfully. "If one thinks of it seriously, every one is useful in some way or other."

Miss Heaton gave up arguing, and took to herring-boning flannel, for, when her feelings were ruffled, she generally went to seek consolation in a flannel petticoat—an intimate friend—and even Herbert himself always tried to avoid saying much when she was engaged on flannel.

Elva cared for none of these things at present, she was enjoying her young dream of happiness with the ardor which characterized her; and, happily for her, love had at once to be represented by action. All Hoel's letters had to be written by her; and what discussions and plans did not this lead to? She had so little to tell him about the outside world, and he had so much to tell her; though, of course, perfect candor is impossible between two beings who have to begin a new life of thought together. In the first place, there was all the truth about his uncle Mellish: the man whom the world looked upon as his father. Elva

was prepared to like him. Curiosity about a set of new relations was quite natural; and Hoel expressed himself very properly concerning his uncle. But then, how could he explain to Elva that as she was an heiress, he was overjoyed at being able to tell his uncle, in a perfectly correct fashion, that he might keep or throw away his money as he liked. No; Elva could not be told this; but, nevertheless, Hoel's secret satisfaction over this fact considerably heightened his happiness. It might be a very unworthy feeling; but it was there.

Elva's sudden softness was also most gratifying to his manly feelings. If he had admired the independent, original-minded Elva Kestell, he loved her in a far more satisfactory manner now that the feminine element of tenderness was so much more apparent. That desire for mastery in man has its great, as well as its little side; it springs from the wealth of his strength as well as the pride resultant from that strength. It is caused by an earnest desire to protect something weaker than itself, in order that strength may be more fully realized. On the other hand, it is difficult to protect a person who fancies she does not need our protection: so that, in truth, the manlier a man is the more will he appreciate the opposite sex in its weakness, and not in its exhibition of independence.

If now and then in their conversations Hoel suddenly discovered in Elva a trace of a finer nature than his own, he would not dwell on the discovery. When once she belonged to him her being would be merged into his, and he was quite ready to share everything with his wife, because, as his wife, Elva would be a reflection of himself. How his heart beat when he saw more plainly every hour that he had been right in following his instinct. Love could drown free thought. In a wife it is better to have an echo than a second voice; and every one acknowledges that there is a strange fascination in echoes, for they enhance the interest of the original sound.

The late autumn weather was very beautiful this year. Winter seemed unwilling to appear; even the leaves fell reluctantly from their parent stem. All along the road by the Four Pools the gorgeous coloring seemed to make spurious sunshine. The beeches were dazzling to look at; the oaks, too, with every shade of gold, russet, and brown,

did their best to cheat autumn of its sorrow. To walk side by side with Hoel, sheltered from wind and all, even to pause and sit down on some bank of dry leaves, seemed to Elva a perfect foretaste of happiness. If now and then she found herself disagreeing with him, she was silent, or only half expressed her disagreement, for fear of marring all the harmony of the moment. Of one thing, however, they never spoke; and that was of Elva's former attempts at writing a book. She even felt ashamed of the attempt; it was as if she had dishonored the profession of letters. Hoel, who was so clever, so keen a critic, was very good not to recur to the subject. So she thought when, side by side, they discussed books or talked of the future; but during some moments when he was not with her, a sudden wave of thought came over her that, bad as her book might have been in form, there were a few ideas worth something in it. Hoel had acknowledged as much. At such times Elva experienced the first feeling of the bondage of love; for there is nothing more difficult to human beings than to be perfectly true to themselves; the overpowering force of opinion, both public and private, undermines the true self. So crushing can the weight be, that, for the happiness of the individual, it is better to be ignorant of the fact; but the greater originality possessed by the unit the greater will be the power to recognize the overwhelming antagonism of the multitude to the individual. In this fact lies the danger to perfect happiness, even of wedded life; for few men, and fewer women, can realize that freedom is true happiness. Civilized as we are now in this marvelous age of ours, there are yet few who see that slavery is still rampant, the slavery of the mind; and by this we do not mean to touch old-world institutions or their honored customs, or the best authority of parent or teacher, but a far more subtle slavery which, as in the case of Hoel, demands not submission in its vulgar sense, but submission of that heart of a human being which, if once subjected, lives ever in a restless state, knowing that it is not achieving its highest capabilities.

And yet, as far as each of them knew it, and as far as the world could see, this romance was very perfect and very bewitching.

Close by the road, beyond the first Pool, the lovers sat this bright day on a great heap of fir poles. The wind sent

long-drawn-out and somewhat melancholy sighs through the pines, and the bracken waved its tiny answers to it. The fallen firs were reflected in the water. Every now and then Hoel himself came into the water-picture; and Elva watched his reflection with a smile on her face. A passer-by would have involuntarily admired the pair.

They would have been struck by the intellectual refinement of the man's face; but some wave of sympathy would have gone out toward Elva, who, in a dark-brown dress, and a hat surrounded with soft ostrich feathers, united strength and womanliness in a very marked degree.

"It is just a week, Hoel, since that horrid accident," said Elva, clasping her hands in front of her, and looking, not at Hoel, but at his reflection; "to me it seems years, and yet we haven't said half what we want to say; at least, I haven't. You promised you would read your uncle's letter to me. Shall I get it out of your pocket?"

Elva smiled a little shyly. Shyness had come with love, and it made her doubly beautiful in Hoel's eyes.

"My right hand still," he said with an answering smile. "First, I want to tell you about Uncle Mellish. I believe you know that he is very fond of me. He has been a father to me in many ways. On the other hand, I don't think I am as fond of him as I ought to be."

"I hope he will like me. Do you think he will? I am accustomed to old people. At least, papa may be old to some; but to me he always seems young."

"Your father is devoted to you, Elva. When I see him looking at you, I know I have never had a father's love."

"No one can pretend to be a father, can they? Mine is the best, dearest, noblest on earth."

"You are a very faithful friend, dear," he said, taking her right hand in his left one, and kissing it. "No one could call you a fickle woman."

"No, I think not. I am glad you are not like most men, and talk nonsense about all women being fickle and all women being vain."

"You don't believe in tradition then? I suppose all sayings are founded on truth; but all exceptions have a tendency to disbelieve in the rules."

"I suppose men meet curious specimens of our sex which we poor country folk know nothing of. I wonder what is

really the difference between a man and a woman apart from intellectual and physical strength?"

Hoel thought a moment, and then said:

"I think it is a great dread of anything touching their honor—I mean, given a man of honor. I have known men do strangely ill-considered things when they fancied their personal honor was in jeopardy."

"Would you?"

"I can't imagine what would happen to me in that line; but still, I can so well understand the feelings that I conclude I should not be an exception."

"If I jilted you, for instance?" said Elva; and her whole face was illuminated by a smile which made Hoel consider her still more beautiful than he had previously imagined.

"Yes; if you did—I should never forgive you."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes; but then, when I first loved you, I knew that was impossible to your nature."

"I should always love you, whatever you did," said Elva, in a low, passionate voice, which frightened Hoel for a moment, because it was the speech of the Elva he knew so little of and wished to know less.

"Did you ever fall in love before?" she went on, smiling, so that her last words were like an unnatural ruffling of calm waters.

Hoel smiled.

"Never till I saw you. Once I admired a girl very much; but, you see, I can make the confession very calmly."

"You admired her very much, but did not fall in love. That is strange, isn't it? Why was it?"

"In the first place, she was not a lady. Her father was a working farmer somewhere, and her mother a very homely body indeed. Still, I did not know that when I first saw her. She was a very clever girl, very pretty—a governess in a family I used to visit. The eldest son was a college friend of mine."

"And you went there and admired the clever and pretty governess? I wonder if she admired you, and whether you paid her attentions? I sometimes think men who do that are answerable for a great many heartaches."

Hoel smiled at Elva's earnestness.

"There was, I dare say, some imprudence on my part,

but I hope not much. In the first place, I knew beforehand Uncle Mellish would never give his consent. I did not mind much about that; but my means were then less than they are now, and my prospects not so good. I was never far gone enough to be unable to reason with myself."

"Oh, then there was no fear of your being very much in love. If I loved, I should not reason at all—"

"A woman's argument. But, you see, men ought to reason. Anyhow, Elsie Warren could never have been my wife."

"Elsie Warren; what a pretty name! But why, Hoel? Men have done all sorts of things for love."

"Because I found out that her father had been, when quite a young man, imprisoned for a forgery. He yielded to a sudden temptation, and the poor fellow expiated his crime in prison. When he came out, he married, and was a very respectable member of society ever afterward. The story was but little known, and it was quite by chance that I found it out."

"But poor Elsie Warren could not help that. Surely she was guiltless enough."

"Oh, quite; a perfectly ideal woman—all golden hair and good feeling. But it was what I was telling you just now; I could no more have married that girl, even if I had loved her a thousand times more than I love you—which, remember, I did not—than I could have gone to Uncle Mellish, and asked him how much money he was going to leave me!"

"How strange!" said Elva, letting go Hoel's hand, and gazing at the slow flight of a rook, "how strange! Now, if I had been a man, I would have married Elsie Warren, because her father had been once disgraced; and I should have shown her that love can make up for everything."

"Would you? And, afterward, you would have repented. Surely it were wiser to pause first. Think of that black secret between a man and his wife always there; and if he were of a suspicious nature he would have said she may deceive me as her father deceived his own father, for he forged his father's name. There might be even a lifelong dread that his children might inherit crime. No, a thousand times no!"

"Oh, but love is so merciful," said Elva, starting up in her excitement. "Hoel, you talk like this just because

you did not love that girl, and so it is all right. But I know you better. If you had loved her, all those future and past reasonings would have disappeared; you would have acted as you did last Saturday. You would have said, 'Let me suffer, only let me keep suffering away from others.' I know you would. If I had been a man, I would have gone to her, and said—"

"Said what, Elva?" answered Hoel, now rising and putting Elva's right hand in his left arm. This was just a case in which he preferred Elva's agreeing with him.

"That we are not sent into the world to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children."

"But I am not sure that I should then have been speaking the truth. Man is made a judge over his fellows, otherwise, how would society get on at all? From the times of the patriarchs to the days of constitutional government, we can follow the progress of human law, or, as some would say, the Divine will, carried out by the human instrument."

The two walked on in silence a little while. Elva was turning her thoughts over, unable to express what she felt, till at last Hoel, feeling she was wandering a little from the center round which he liked her best to circle, remarked:

"A woman's love, darling, is the grandest and the best thing on earth; but she must not always expect her judgment to be the same. Anyhow, on the score of honor, you and I shall always be at one. If you are lenient in thought, you would be stern in principle."

"I am afraid you would always bring me round to your view against my will," said Elva; and Hoel, with a sudden wave of love, admiration, and entire agreement with her last speech, sealed it with a kiss. And then, when they had reached another secluded spot, he took a small volume from his pocket and read out a poem he had brought to discuss with his betrothed. It was "The Palace of Art," which, it so happened, Elva did not know well. Hoel read beautifully; it was a pleasure to listen to him, and Elva's whole soul seemed to lie in the placid depth of her gray eyes as he finished:

> "Yet pull not down my palace towers that are
> So lightly, beautifully built;
> Perchance I may return with others there,
> When I have purged my guilt."

"I suppose," said Elva, "I have built my palace of art now; but I do not wish to leave it."

And Hoel was not insensible to this exquisite flattery; exquisite because it came from true lips. Was it possible for a man not to feel elated by it? Not certainly for a man like Hoel, who was clever enough to know truth that was veiled in humility. Love and life were beautiful to both to-day, and worthy to be sung by poets.

CHAPTER VI.

RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS.

JESSE VICARY'S name had not yet been mentioned at Rushbrook since Hoel had been in the house. He seemed hardly worth wasting time over when so many much more delightful topics were always at hand. Hoel's arm was going on as well as possible. He had leave of absence from the editor of "The Current Reader," and he felt he had honestly earned a holiday. The letter from his uncle, which he had forgotten to show Elva, and which he was not particularly anxious to show her, had given him secret pleasure. He saw plainly his uncle was nettled; that he recognized that the marriage he was going to make, if not likely to enrich him much in the actual present, yet certainly placed the future in a golden light. No need of any more "ifs" from his uncle.

The next day, which was Sunday, Hoel amused himself by sitting in an easy-chair by a large fire in the drawing-room, and rereading his uncle's epistle. Elva was busy with various small duties, and had volunteered to take a class in the place of Miss Grey, who was beginning to think she had worked very long without reward, and that if the vicar did not soon declare his intentions, he must take the consequences, in the shape of the loss of a teacher, a pair of worked slippers, and one less at the daily morning service, etc., etc.

All this reasoning was, however, imprisoned in Miss Grey's heart; nothing was known of it but a sad little note addressed to Mr. Heaton, which spoke of a heavy cold and the anxieties of her aunt, who had seen the doctor shake his head during his last visit to herself. This had led Miss Heaton to remark:

"Really, Herbert, what nonsense! Old Miss Grey is so

silly. Doctors always shake their heads; they learn that sort of thing when they take their first practice. Miss Jane Grey is as strong as a horse, and she writes to you because she knows you are so tender-hearted. Whatever you do, don't answer the note. I will write to Elva Kestell. She is doing nothing but spoon about with Hoel Fenner. Lovers do annoy me so much, I am quite glad to separate them."

"Wait till you are in that happy state yourself, Clara," said the vicar, smiling. "However, if Miss Kestell will take the class, I shall be much obliged to her."

And Elva, in the fullness of her new joy, had said "Yes." Joy had a softening influence on her. She wanted to learn to do all the things Hoel approved of, and she had heard him admire Amice's self-devotion to her poor neighbors; so she hoped to imitate her.

"You would hardly know Elva," her mother said to Mr. Kestell. "I never thought she would give up her own will like that. They will be very tiresome lovers." All the same, Mrs. Kestell looked ten years younger, and was a great deal more among the home circle. She even found energy enough to scold Amice for going about as if she were dreaming, and asked Hoel to see if he could not reform her. Hoel was so clever at knowing the peerage, that he won his future mother-in-law's heart; her only complaint of him was that he could not be found in Debrett.

Hoel was much interested to find himself for the first time in his life one of a family circle. It was a novel situation for him, and he noticed many things which a young man accustomed to a home-life would have overlooked. Even at this moment, while he waited for Mr. Kestell to fetch him for a stroll before the carriage came round, he wondered why it was that, during all this week, he had not in the least advanced in intimacy with Amice. He did not know her or understand her better than on the first Sunday he had seen her. He did not like to have his penetration baffled. Never before had he looked at a human face and read nothing on it which he could understand. Good and devoted she was certainly, but what was her motive? Was she in love with Herbert Heaton? A hopeless attachment? No. If there were any understanding between them, Elva would have told him about it.

What could make a girl with wealth, position, and everything that heart could desire, dress somewhat dowdily, visit the poor, and altogether act like no other young lady of his acquaintance? Elva seemed to take her sister's conduct as a matter of course. Perhaps it was only his ignorance of family life. Hoel was always careful never to show ignorance on any subject; and, in truth, he had but little to hide. No, he gave up this puzzle, and reread Uncle Mellish's letter. It ran thus:

"My dear Hoel,—I must thank you for your telegram sent Sunday morning, which informed me of your safety, before I knew, indeed, that there had been any accident, as I do not see an evening paper. Let me congratulate you on having sustained merely a slight injury. I hope the company will pay your doctor's bill, as in duty bound. And now, my dear Hoel, what shall I say about your next piece of news? It was most unexpected, and I have not yet considered it in all its bearings. Till I have seen the young lady in question, I can not say whether you are as fortunate as your lover-like sentiments would lead me to expect, lovers' praises being proverbially blind. What you say of the lady's fortune looks well on paper; but you must not think me unfeeling if I waive my remarks till I have found out all particulars from independent sources. I have heard from an acquaintance that Kestell of Greystone was considered to be a very wealthy man, as he owns some valuable mining property in the North; but, of course, all this wants confirmation. And, successful as you have been, the small fortune left you by your father will, I fear, not satisfy the requirements of a wife brought up in the lap of luxury. I wish I were able to travel. I could then come and talk matters over with you. As this is out of the question, I hope, my dear Hoel, you will soon be able to come to me, when I shall be glad to satisfy myself that you are not committing an imprudence for want of sound advice. Always your affectionate uncle,

"Mellish Fenner."

"Good heavens! I hope I shall never be so calculating," thought Hoel, folding up the letter with an impatient movement. "He wants me to go to him and say,

'Uncle, I can't marry without your help. You have hinted that I am to be your heir. What will you do for me now?' No! if I had to beg for my next meal, nothing could induce me to do this. I should like to know what enjoyment the old man gets out of his hoarded gold? Patronage must be wonderful balm to the shriveled mind if he can carry his folly as far as this. My choice has displeased my uncle just because it is not imprudent. I verily believe he has been waiting for the time when I should fall in love in some foolish fashion with a penniless beauty, to come down with his advice and his offer of help. Merciful heavens! what a trap I have escaped! Elsie Warren would have been just the occasion for Uncle Mellish's *mise en scène*. The old fellow has the dramatic element in his character; wants to come in as the *Deus ex machinâ*, in the third act, and say: 'Bless you, my children, if you are good I will give you jam to put on your bread and butter.' Upon my word I do feel glad, and sorry at the same time—sorry the poor old man has missed his great opportunity. Even now I shudder to think I might have had to eat a large slice of humble pie; but no, no, that surely would have been impossible. I, Hoel Fenner, have also my rightful pride. Ah, Uncle Mellish, you can put a child in the corner, but you can not make him say he is sorry, or good, just when you choose. I have carefully avoided going into that corner, and it is this which upsets all your calculations. I can afford to be generous, being the winner in the race, and I will take Elva down to see him on the first opportunity. Even my uncle's deep-laid plans and minute strategical movements will melt before her perfectly simple mind. It is no use preparing a campaign when the enemy has no intention of moving out of camp. The worst was that my uncle knew I was aware of his ideas, and delighted in that knowledge. Freedom, in my case, has had no drawbacks in the buying. Elva little knows that she has given me even more than a noble woman, and I do not want her to know it. A woman's mind should be onefold. It's bad enough to know a scheming man; but a woman! Heaven defend the poor fellow who marries one."

Such a mental soliloquy put Hoel into a perfect state of mind this Sunday morning. He could even have faced a sermon from a Scotch minister going up to "tenthly;"

much more then could he bear with equanimity and perfect composure the drive with Mr. Kestell and Elva to the pretty church in the fir wood, surrounded by so many exquisite views.

Elva returned from her class with every feature beaming with happiness. Hoel met her on the bridge, and for a moment they joined hands, leaned over, and gazed at the water which every day seemed to show them a new picture of happiness.

"Hoel, I am sure I can not be meant to teach country children," she said, smiling. "I was thinking of you all the time, and I let them make mistakes, I believe, because I caught Amice looking at me with much surprise. I wonder how it was Amice grew up so good. She was born good, I believe. When we were girls together, she never disobeyed the governess or did other evil things for which I was often punished."

"I wonder she has not taken the veil, or its English equivalent."

"Amice wants to work in the poor parts of London—that is her ambition; but do not mention it. She is so shy. By the way, I met George Guthrie, and he is coming in to dinner this evening. He means to tease me about—being engaged. He is so glad that he foresaw it; but I tell him it is not true, because I don't believe I should have cared for you really, Hoel, if it had not been for that accident."

"You wanted a hero, and you won't believe that I am no such thing."

"You are more of a hero because you don't know it," said Elva, falling into the error of a young and generous mind.

"Well, I shall be a hero to the best and sweetest wife in the land; that is all I care about, and more than I deserve. Look at that ripple, Elva, it parts our reflection, and makes you appear far off instead of near to me."

"I hope when you are as old as papa you will love me as much as he does his wife. It is so pathetic to see love between old people. Do you know, Hoel, that all his life, since he married, I believe his first thought has been for her. I sometimes wish I could have seen that courtship."

Hoel could not sympathize much with Mr. Kestell's admiration for the invalid fine lady whose words showed no great elevation of thought.

"The constancy of man," he smiled in answer.

"Yes, that first made me understand that there was something divine in love. Now I see the carriage coming round. You must not mind Mr. Heaton being a little dull. You know, Hoel, we can not get your grand London preachers here."

As we have said, Hoel was in a state to be pleased with everything. He even spoke cordially to Miss Heaton before the service, when she offered congratulations in a tone which meant: "I am sorry for you."

"I am very glad Elva will have some one to guide her taste," she said, not being able to hope much from Hoel's religious influence; "but I am afraid, Elva, that your father, who does not look at all well, may miss you sadly."

Mr. Kestell had gone into church, and Elva felt a pang when she remembered that she had not asked him about himself this morning. Miss Heaton always said something to make one feel uncomfortable. She had a talent for this.

"We shall have to follow the fashion, I fear," answered Hoel, gravely. "It is public opinion that settles personal taste, and really it saves a good deal of trouble."

"I believe there is a very bad tone now in the artistic and literary circles in London," said Miss Heaton, in a sad and much shocked voice.

"Yes, I fear there is. They admire all ugly shades of yellow, a color to which I have a great dislike."

"I meant morally, Mr. Fenner. The laxity of religious opinion in town is very sad. One can not feel too thankful that Herbert refused a London living, though, of course, we should have tried, even there, to impress a higher ideal on those about us."

"I am sure you would have succeeded," said Hoel, gravely. "A little leaven, you know, Miss Heaton, has powerful effects."

"Hoel, it is time to go in," said Elva, and Hoel followed his betrothed, feeling thankful that she, at least, had resisted Miss Heaton's influence.

Mr. Heaton's sermon was not very long, and did not weary his listeners. He reminded his congregation that the year was dying, and before the last hours of it had come, before it was too late, he begged them to render to

Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God that which belongs to Him.

"Restitution of all things, my friends, is a grand conception, the restitution of everything that we have taken from others all our life long. Not to this congregation shall I speak of stolen goods, none of us have had this temptation; but how many of us have stolen from our neighbor things which can not be returned! A good name, perhaps, a virtue which was theirs, and which our temper has ruined, an original thought, and basely called it ours; or their time, and thought nothing of it; their love, and have carelessly lost it. The thief on the cross does not represent the criminal class alone, my friends; but every one of us who in this world—a world which God made and filled with gifts—have labored, and only enriched the earth by theft.

"But restitution is promised, and in our ignorance we ask Heaven, 'How is this possible? Take all that I have, and yet it will not suffice to restore to man what I have taken from him; then how shall I restore to God?'

"My friends, my parishioners, my little children, begin the divine work yourselves; begin to-day the work of restitution. Do not wait till the warfare is accomplished; restore the beauty you have taken; restore the kind word you hid, and if it leaves you poor, what matters? Christ was poor. What is temporal poverty but great riches; what is earthly loss but great gain? You will have love in your hearts, and you will have begun the kingdom of God upon earth, which is the restitution of all things."

There was one person in that little country church whose blue eyes, fixed on Herbert Heaton's face, took his words to her heart. Amice, seated among the school-children, seemed lost to all but the simple words, which, spoken from the man's heart, were therefore so powerful. Slowly her eyes turned from Herbert's pulpit to her father's pew, where, seated near to Hoel and Elva, the old man bent forward in a listening attitude.

"If he can listen and not show any emotion," thought poor Amice, "I shall know that it is my own foolish mind. Is my idea evil, or a warning? Have we somehow failed toward Jesse Vicary, or toward any one, and do we owe

restitution? I am willing to make it. I can give up everything I possess."

Amice's gaze was so direct, so penetrating, that, though Mr. Kestell looked only at the preacher, he became gradually conscious of it. Without moving his head he knew as well as if he could see her, that his younger daughter's blue, strange eyes were fixed on him. All the more reason for not moving a muscle. Every nerve was strained in order to accomplish the task, by no means easy, if any one has tried it, for there is a mesmeric power in all eyes. In some, a very strong power that compels us to obey their commands, or else employ an antagonistic force against it.

Mr. Kestell never moved, and Herbert's short sermon drew to a close. Now it was over; there was a stir everywhere; and each person rose. Mr. Kestell also pushed away his hassock and stood up. Some one must have got between him and Amice, he argued, and, forgetting himself, his eyes gradually turned toward her corner. No, there were those terrible eyes, that maddening look. It was enough to—to— His hand trembled, and the prayer-book he held fell to the ground.

"Another Sunday," thought Mr. Kestell, "either Amice or I will go to the Beacon Church."

"Elva, I shall walk home," said Amice, softly, after service. "Don't wait for me."

And then the girl disappeared into the wood at the back of the church.

A little later the young vicar, coming out of the vestry, saw Amice Kestell waiting for him. He remembered all his sister's warning about the few minutes' conversation, but he felt glad that Amice had chosen a moment when no one was likely to hinder him.

"Ah, you wanted to see me, Miss Amice! I had not forgotten. Shall we walk down the avenue? It is quite quiet there."

He was so much accustomed to seeing Amice's strange blue eyes that, being simple-hearted, and not very easily impressed, he was not aware of any peculiarity in them; he believed in her goodness, that was all. This he had often proved.

Amice turned toward the avenue without answering, and Herbert Heaton walked beside her, waiting a few moments

for her to begin the conversation, till, fancying she wanted encouragement, he said:

"What were you wanting me for, Miss Amice? How can I help you?"

"Just now," she said, "you were preaching about restitution. Do you mean all you said— I mean, how is it possible to begin now, this very minute? Tell me."

"That depends on what kind of restitution you mean. If we have pulled down, we must build up again, brick by brick. It is not easy."

He was thinking of minute thefts of thoughts and words; he left out deeds.

"You know Jesse Vicary? His sister is with us: we have stolen her from him. How shall we restore her? Can you understand? We have from childhood protected her from outside influence; we have accustomed her to being sheltered till now she can not face difficulties; in fact, we have enslaved her."

"My dear Miss Amice," said the vicar, startled by this way of reproducing his sermon, "you are going a little beyond my meaning. I think Symee Vicary is a good and faithful servant, and surely she is safer with you than roughing it with her brother. Are you not exaggerating my meaning?"

"No, I think not. We have no right to keep Symee because she is useful to us. Think how much happier she will be in London, in all that poor district, able to see misery around her, and to help to do away with some of it; she will have to pinch, and to save. She will be stinted, perhaps, but then she will be helping her brother, helping to make his life less lonely. He is so good, you know, and he wants her; but we have persuaded her to stay with us at Rushbrook."

"'We' can not mean you, Miss Amice; if you think the life you have just sketched out is so beautiful, then you can hardly have wished to have kept her from it. But if some other members of your family have not thought the same, I can hardly blame them."

He smiled so kindly, that Amice could not help looking up and giving him an answering smile in return.

"You do not understand. I do think that sort of life far happier than ours. We have so much money, it is even impossible to be charitable; we can not miss what we

give. But about Symee? May I persuade her to go? I think I can. But I shall be acting in direct opposition to all the others."

"That is, then, your question? Oh! now I see your meaning. And, really, it seems hardly a question I can decide."

"And yet you said so just now. We have stolen Symee, and you will not say you think it right to restore her."

Herbert Heaton was a good deal perplexed by this curious interpretation of his words. He hardly liked to agree or to disagree without knowing more; there was a difficulty in either decision. Suddenly a bright idea struck him.

"Shall I have a talk with her brother, when next I go up to town, and see what he says?"

"How soon shall you be going?" said the girl, looking up at him earnestly.

"Before Christmas, I believe; I want to choose books for our prizes."

"That is a long time to wait."

"Are you not in danger of exaggerating the importance of your own ideas, Miss Amice?" said Herbert, gently. "Symee Vicary must be very safe and very happy with you, and poor Vicary has to fight the hard battle of life. Are we sure that it is well to make his sister share it? Now, I promise you I will go and see him, and from his answer we shall be able to judge what is right."

Amice breathed a little sigh of relief.

"Thank you, very much," she said, pausing, now they had got to the gate which led out upon the open forest land, and from whence they could see the chimneys of Rushbrook House, "thank you, you are very good and kind; sometimes the weight of—our responsibility seems very heavy, and I have no one I can speak to about it. I suppose clergymen ought to help us, and yet they seem so far off from rich people."

Herbert Heaton's face looked troubled. Without knowing it, Amice had touched a sore point in his own conscience.

"That is true, and yet I have often tried to see how one could be more of a shepherd to all the sheep. You hardly understand the difficulty, Miss Amice; the rich would be the first to reject our help, they would call it interfering with their freedom, and I know not what else."

"I don't think so, and if there are some like myself, then they must often long for spiritual help. Think of the way we are weighted with gold. That is our curse, I know it is; doesn't the Bible say, 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom,' and yet we are treated as if our way to heaven were quite plain and easy, and we required no one to help us."

"But you can very easily ask for the help. You forget that."

At that moment Miss Heaton's prim, severe figure was seen hurrying down the avenue toward them. What she had long dreaded was before her. Herbert and that strange girl, Amice Kestell, were actually talking alone together. It was dreadful, shocking, and she had, of course, chosen this time, when no one was about and every one had gone home. Happily for Herbert, his sister's watchful eyes had discovered that he had not come in, and she had, therefore, gone after him. The supposed culprits waited in silence for her approach—the silence of guilt, thought Miss Heaton. Had she not foreseen what a few minutes' conversation meant?

"Herbert, if you do not come in now, you will be late for luncheon," she said; "and you know you have to go to that class."

Amice seemed hardly to hear the austere lady's words; but she understood she had done wrong, and opening the wicket, passed out in silence.

"Miss Amice," said the vicar, "I shall be very glad to do as you suggested. Pray do not forget that."

"Thank you," said Amice, as she hurried away.

The vicar retraced his steps to the vicarage in silence; but he did hear his sister's remark:

"That girl is extremely deep, Herbert, in spite of her innocent eyes and her shy ways. Mrs. Eagle Bennison told me only yesterday she couldn't make her out."

"She is very good," said Herbert, and Miss Heaton thought it best to mourn in silence.

"But I shall watch," she said.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO IS JOHN PELLEW?

THIS Sunday evening at Rushbrook was an especially cheerful one. Mrs. Kestell was enjoying the novelty of having an attentive son. Elva was sitting near her father, glad to see him smile at the attacks made upon her by George Guthrie; and this excellent bachelor was amusing himself by watching the little attempts at private talk in which Hoel and Elva indulged. There was a combined hunt for some music, and the search for a book Mr. Kestell asked for; and all these little scenes—the sign of happiness in lovers—were, of course, so much ammunition for his small shots.

"Now, Fenner, you must agree that a railway accident is a most convenient pleader for a lover," said George Guthrie, after dinner, as they sat round the fire. "If I had happened to be in your place on that eventful Saturday, I have not the smallest doubt that the fair Elva would have turned her affectionate heart toward me. Have we not teased each other, which is equivalent to love, from our earliest infancy?"

"Your infancy!" said Elva, laughing. "I don't remember it."

"On the contrary, I am still in infancy. My cousin, Mrs. Eagle Bennison, says I am still a child; and this I consider is a compliment delicately veiled in metaphor. Does it not mean the most bewitching simplicity? Do not all mammas treat me in the most confiding, touching manner; would they not trust me with their choicest buds and their tenderest blossoms?"

"Well, certainly, you are very safe, George," said Mrs. Kestell, smiling; "because every one knows you are a confirmed bachelor. Mrs. Pigot said so only the other day. It is so convenient to have unattached men at hand."

"Yes; there it is again. A confirmed bachelor! I have heard that phrase a hundred thousand times; and yet I feel in my manly bosom the— How shall I put it, Fenner?"

"Put it delicately, please," said Hoel, "in the presence of these lovers."

"Truthfully, I should say," added Mr. Kestell, "to the best of my belief, George, you have never been in love; and, strange to say, I have never heard you even accused of such a crime!"

"Now, quiet Amice, you are the youngest in this room. Out of the mouths of babes let us hear truth. Have I, or have I not, shown the signs of a long-standing malady called love?"

Amice's blue eyes looked gravely into his face, and every one, except her father, laughed at her earnestness.

"Yes, I think you did once love some one, or you could not pretend to be so heart-whole."

"Unrighteous judge!" cried George, laughing, and only Amice noted that the faintest shade of color rose to his cheeks. "Hear her, ye witnesses! Now Elva, what say you?"

"That you certainly know nothing about it, and had much better let the subject alone."

"Then you won't hear the 'Poem of a Bachelor,' which I wrote out during the small hours of the morning? Think of this sleepless activity, Fenner, and envy me! I dare say, now, not an idea comes to you in sleep!"

"Let us hear your verses," said Mr. Kestell, stroking Elva's soft hair. When near to her, his face always brightened up, as if her very touch gave him comfort and strength.

"The title is, 'A Heart to be Let.' Mrs. Kestell, have I your permission to recite these lines, which, I assure you, are admirable?"

"Certainly. When I was young I knew a man who was very clever at impromptu. You had only to give him the subject, and he gave you the verses."

"But, dear mamma, don't believe in George's impromptu. If it is his own, he has been years writing it; but most likely it is only an adopted child," said Elva, laughing so happily that the merriment was catching.

"Some adopted children know not the difference. It is all humbug about recognizing the affinity of next of kin—poetic nonsense. Humph! Listen, lords and ladies gay:

"'To be let, at a very desirable rate,
A snug little home in a healthy state,
'Tis a Bachelor's heart, and the agent is Chance,
Affection the Rent—to be paid in advance.

The owner, as yet, has lived in it alone,
So the fixtures are not of much value; but soon
'Twill be furnished by Cupid himself, if a wife
Take a lease for the term of her natural life.
Then, ladies, dear ladies, pray do not forget,
An excellent Bachelor's heart to be let!
The Tenant will have few taxes to pay,
Love, honor, and (heaviest item) obey.
As for the "Good-will," the subscriber's inclined
To have that, if agreeable, settled in kind;
Indeed, if he could such a matter arrange,
Provided true title by prudence be shown,
Any heart unincumbered and free as his own
So ladies, dear ladies, do not forget,
An excellent Bachelor's heart to be let!'

Now what do you think of my poem? Is it not pithy, and much to the point?"

"I should like you to prove your title to it first," said Elva. "Hoel, do you believe it is his?"

"I hope not," said Hoel. "I shall have to say as did our chief editor once to a conceited poet: 'Sir, your verses show no promise of future fame; so, for the present, they are worthless.'"

"Talleyrand did it better," said George. "Do you remember, Fenner, the poor, poor poet who was reciting his own verses to the great wit? Talleyrand, perceiving a man yawning a little way off, said, pointing him out politely to the reciter: 'Not so loud, dear sir; he hears you.'"

Hoel had forgotten the story, which made every one laugh. Certainly, George Guthrie was a very mine of good stories, which before now Elva had been heard to declare he invented.

"Your cousin must never find the house dull when you are in it," said Mrs. Kestell. "Has she many societies now to look after?"

"The Taps at present reign supreme. Actually Miss Heaton has made friends with the squire's wife on this subject. By the way, Elva, this lady much disapproves of your engagement; and I did not soften the matter by suggesting she should follow your example. Imagine, Mr. Kestell, the brave man who would lead Miss Heaton to the altar?"

"Isn't it a chance for the bachelor?" said Hoel.

"Well, so I thought this morning after service; and as

I walked a little way with her I quoted worthy Samuel to her—in vain. She cast only reproachful glances upon me, and said she was going to look for Herbert. What an eye she keeps upon him!"

"George, how ridiculous you are! What did you say?" said Elva.

"My dear Elva, it was only the second part of a poem. I left out the prologue, which I considered a little too moral. I dare say none of you study Samuel Johnson as I do. I walk on the ancient paths, and leave Browning for the modern Hoel Fenners."

"And pray what was the second part?" said Mr. Kestell.

"'Ladies, stock and tend your hive,
Trifle not at thirty-five;
For howe'er we boast and strive,
Life declines from thirty-five.
He that ever hopes to thrive,
Must begin by thirty-five;
And all who wisely wish to wive,
Must play for Heat-on thirty-five.'

I only altered the last line, which you see is a little lame. I had ideas of working out the motive of Thrale. Indeed, I might have turned it into Thralldom, but feared to offend. You know even Samuel made puns in his moments of relaxation."

"I don't wonder Miss Heaton scorned you; really, George, you are incorrigible! Miss Heaton already thinks that Amice and myself are bad specimens of modern education. And as for you, she must fancy you are beyond reform."

"How were your lines received?" said Hoel.

"Why, much in the same way as Archelaus answered the worthy barber who said, 'How shall I shave you?' 'In silence,' replied the sage."

"I fear it did not crush you," said Elva. "I never was able to do that, though I began, as you know, in infancy."

"Miss Heaton succeeded, nevertheless. By the way, Mr. Kestell, have you heard how that poor fellow is—the one you went to see at Greystone? I asked Smith, who knows everything, when I was there yesterday, and he said the man Joseph Button was in a bad way. I think when

there are not many customers, Smith studies his old books; reads up Samuel, I fancy."

Mr. Kestell turned his face slightly toward George Guthrie, as he answered:

"Did you go and see him?"

"I? Oh, no! That special public-house having a bad name, I was afraid of the risk to my good character by being seen there; but your philanthropy has got into the 'Greystone Advertiser.'"

"Really, Josiah," said his wife, "you are too good to all those people; they impose upon you."

"Button, you know, was once in my employment. Poor fellow, I turned him off for drink; still, I have a regard for him. I am sorry he is in a bad way."

"I expect it was more the shock to his nervous system than anything else," said Hoel. "I hear all the other sufferers have been moved; but this Button, who was least hurt, remains behind. I suppose, therefore, that in spite of bad repute, mine host is kind."

"I should like to go and see this poor man," said Elva, returning to sit near to her father. "I can't help feeling thankful that you or Hoel are not in his place."

"No, no; certainly not," said her father, quickly. "Hoel, you must not let Elva go to that place. It would never do."

"But with Hoel, papa, what could hurt me?"

"No, dear; I would prefer your not going. I shall go again myself to-morrow, or Tuesday, and see about him. This week I shall go into Greystone as usual."

"You have not looked so well this week, papa. You ought not to bother about this poor fellow; but of course I won't go if you don't like it. Hoel shall go alone."

"Don't trouble him about that. Button, I expect, is quite happy in a place where he can get drink. I warned him against it; but in vain, I fear."

"Surely, then, he should be got out of it as soon as possible, and before he gets drowned," said George. "I am sure, Mr. Kestell, you had better use me as your messenger. I expect my character has this evening been so impugned that there is nothing much left of it. Even the Taps would refuse to begin their work on me; and I am ready to be sent on a 'sleeveless errand,' as old Mrs. Joyce says; and if you bid me, I will bring back some of the

articles required of fools in the old days—pigeons' milk or stirrup oil."

"I promise my messengers no such difficult task. I told this Button to call here when he was well enough, and I know his interest will not allow him to forget this duty."

Mr. Kestell laughed a little.

"Well, just as you like. Now, Elva, when are we to have some sacred solace, or, as an Eastern poet says, when may we listen to 'the love-struck nightingale's delightful strain?'"

"George, you do not deserve to hear any music. As to your Eastern names, I prefer plain English."

All the same, Elva rose and went toward the piano, while George answered:

"My language is too ornate to please you, I see. I am—"

"I ask not proud philosophy to teach me what thou art. Still, as Hoel has never heard Amice sing, I shall give him the treat. Please don't refuse, Amice," said her sister, going up to her.

Amice rose from her low chair in the shadow of the curtain, and went toward the piano, but with evident reluctance.

"I am glad you can rout out Amice a little," said Mrs. Kestell, sadly. "She gets quieter every day. We shall have to wait for Mrs. Fenner to take her out. By the way, Josiah, do you know that I have been getting up the county families this afternoon, and I find that Mr. Fenner is connected with the Pellews? You knew some of them, didn't you? I fancy before we married you talked of one of that family?"

Elva and Amice were by the piano hunting for some music, but at this name Amice slowly raised her head, and looked toward her father. Was it her fancy that his hand appeared slightly to shake as he put down on the table a book he held in his hand?

"Indeed! I didn't know that Fenner was acquainted with any of that family. Not that I was very intimate with them; they were from the Midlands; but I once had some business connection with one of the Pellews. Still, they are a large and scattered family. I know nothing of them now."

"I am aware of the fact of relationship," said Hoel,

"and that is all. I must own to a certain idleness in keeping up with mere connections. My uncle is a great antiquarian in respect of families, and could, I am sure, go through all of them; but he kindly spares me, knowing my supreme indifference to such genealogies."

"Indeed, Hoel," said Mrs. Kestell, "you are quite wrong. Cousins are very useful people, you owe them nothing, and want nothing from them, and yet, as the French say, '*On a souvent besoin d'un plus petit que soi.*' What do the Pellews consist of now? Do you know, Josiah?"

"It was a John Pellew who bought that land," thought Amice, putting the music on the stand; she would not, however, have dared to say this aloud. "Papa said he had business transactions with him. Then, perhaps, it was merely that he bought Westacre Lands from him. There can be nothing strange in that. Oh, it is my horrible, wicked fancy!"

She shivered a little, and said to Elva:

"I don't feel inclined to sing, Elva, to-night. Besides, sacred music may not be to Mr. Fenner's taste."

"Why don't you call him Hoel, dear? He won't like your being so formal. But you must sing. George, come and take a part in this trio, and leave county families alone. Mamma and Hoel can discuss them afterward."

George Guthrie rose and came to the piano. He was quite serious for him, as he took up a sheet of music and bent a little toward Elva.

"Your father looks very unwell to-night, Elva. That Doctor Pink has not done him much good, has he? Like the rest of his profession, I expect he is quite—"

"Indeed, you are mistaken. Doctor Pink has almost cured papa of that sudden dizziness he had last week. It was the accident that upset him again a little."

"Well, you ought to know best; but just this moment I noticed an expression of pain come over his face. Perhaps he is tired with our nonsense. Let's sing. Come, fairest nymph, resume thy reign—or thy piano. What shall we sing? And pray, Amice, look more cheerful. How can you expect to find a lover if you look so like a ghost? Well, here I am,

"'Gayly the troubadour touched his—'"

Elva came down with a strong, powerful chord upon the piano, and soon the three, who had often sung together, began a sacred trio.

When the singing ended, Hoel could not help taking more notice of Amice. Certainly he had not heard such a voice before in a private drawing-room. The full, deep, rich contralto was quite out of the ordinary run of untrained voices; but the sadness and pathos were almost too pathetic. "I prefer my Elva's voice," he thought to himself, though he recognized the greater merits of her sister's singing.

Mr. Kestell now asked his wife if she were tired; and, as usual when she was down-stairs, he gave her his arm in the courtly, lover-like manner which struck Hoel, whose politeness was entirely different from the courtliness of the last generation. But in Mr. Kestell's manner to his wife there was even more than that fascinating, courteous attention of our grandfathers. There was the tenderness of a grown-up person to a child.

Hoel noted it with appreciation.

"I must go," said George, when Mr. Kestell returned. "I won't ask the maimed to accompany me. Suppose, Fenner, you slipped coming home over the bridge, and to-morrow morning you were found drowned in the Pool, what would the world say of me? How suspicion would cling to me in spite of innocence, and Elva would pursue me to the death."

"Your conscience would not be very tender," said Elva; "but you may also suppose we should have a search-party before morning."

"Come, Guthrie, I will walk with you to the bridge," said Mr. Kestell.

He moved a few steps toward the door, and a curious and quite unmistakable pallor overspread his features. Elva hurried up to him.

"Papa, what is the matter?"

Mr. Kestell seized hold of the back of a chair with one hand, and passed the other over his forehead.

"A little dizzy, my dear. It is nothing—nothing." Elva snatched a bottle of salts from a side table, and gave them to her father; but he put them aside. "No, no, dear; a little fresh air will restore me. Come, Guthrie."

The two went out, and Elva remained motionless, look-

ing after her father with an anxious expression till Hoel came to her and made her sit down.

"Dearest, don't be anxious about your father; he says it is nothing."

Elva looked up gratefully at Hoel's gentle words. Both forgot Amice's presence.

"Hoel, I can't bear papa to be ill; I feel as if somehow it were my fault; I have not looked after him enough. He is so good, so thoughtful. I half fear he may hide his symptoms from me for fear of giving me trouble, as he does from mamma. But it would be cruel of him if he did this."

There was no doubting the great love between father and daughter. But Hoel for a moment felt a little jealous. Did Elva love him well enough to leave father and mother? Though no one thought of Amice in her corner, she was passing through a worse experience than Elva. She thought: "How Elva loves him! And I—I am trying to hurt him. I have made a vow to find out. Suppose there is nothing to find out. But suppose there is? What will Elva say of me, think of me? And yet justice is greater than love. Must I lose her love to help on a stranger? Oh, that I should be placed in such a position! It can not, it can not be possible."

She folded her hands, and pressed them against her throbbing temples and hid her eyes. She, too, experienced a strange giddiness; the objects round her appeared in a dull, red hue. Even though she pressed out the lamplight, there came before her mental vision quite distinctly, written in red letters on a dull, black ground, the two words, "John Pellew."

That name again—she had seen it on the parchment—had it burned itself into her brain? Who was John Pellew?

With a little cry of pain, suppressed almost before uttered, she left her corner, and advanced into the room where Hoel was bending over his betrothed. He turned round startled when Amice's cold fingers touched the hand that lay on Elva's shoulder; and yet Hoel was neither nervous nor easily startled.

"Mr. Fenner!"

"Good gracious!" he said, involuntarily. "I had forgotten you were here."

"Mr. Fenner, tell me, who is John Pellew?"

Elva looked up, too, and her quick eyes saw the far-away, startled look in her sister's eyes, which had before frightened her. Brave, and quick to reason, she felt Hoel must know nothing of it, and she laughed.

"Dear me, Hoel, pray tell Amice what she wants to know; sometimes she gets a thing into her head, and she goes on worrying till she has found out."

"Indeed, I wish I could tell you; I suppose I must not ask why you want to know? The truth is, the Pellews are only second cousins, once or twice removed, and the members of that section of the family have had many misfortunes, and are not profitable to their acquaintances, I expect, or else Uncle Mellish would have invited them to his house. John is a family name; so you may imagine they are not exactly original-minded. There's a John in every generation; but never the eldest son, who has to bear the name of Hilton before the Pellew, and also another name. I forget what it is, but Biblical, I know; but it is generally dropped for the Hilton. That is all I know; but if you take an interest in the Pellews, I promise to hunt them up."

"Thank you," said Amice, and then Elva took her arm, wished Hoel good-night, bidding him wait up for her father, and see him safe upstairs. Had it not been for Amice she would have done this herself; but she dared not leave her in her present strange state of mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELVA'S PROTECTOR.

When people have experienced disagreeable sensations which they can not exactly catalogue, they prefer to put them away from them without analyzing them. Hoel Fenner woke up the next morning with a strange feeling which he could neither explain nor understand. He remembered waiting for Mr. Kestell's return to the drawing-room, when the sisters had gone, and wondering, as he waited, what had been the cause of their father's sudden indisposition. Why had he rejected all offers of help? Then Hoel, too, remembered he had, even more than before, felt that Amice Kestell was a strange and peculiar being. There was something about her he could not

fathom, and this feeling, to a man of Hoel's intensely practical nature, was somewhat irritating. He liked everything to be of the plainest and most straightforward character, and it seemed almost an insult to have laid before him something which he could not unravel.

For this reason Hoel, when he woke up, decided that, after his marriage, he would discourage much intercourse with his sister-in-law. Anything peculiar was abhorrent to him. He positively shrunk from personal deformity just as much as he shrunk from any want of mental balance. In this way alone did he show that he, too, was vulnerable, and influenced by the unexplained, for, by rejecting it so vehemently, he tacitly acknowledged that it had some effect upon him.

For, it had happened that Mr. Kestell had not reappeared in the drawing-room; and Hoel, after waiting some time, with the last number of "The Current Reader" in his hand, walked into the hall, and looked round. No one was there; the hall door was locked and bolted; but the hall lamp still burned brightly. There were two candlesticks on the marble table, evidently meant for himself and Mr. Kestell. Hoel paused by the table and listened. Strange that he had not heard Mr. Kestell come in. His eyes turned toward the study door; there was a light there. Hoel moved softly toward it.

Elva would be anxious about her father. Should he go in or not? A man's study is his sanctum—a place not to be lightly invaded; but, on the other hand, the old man had certainly seemed unwell. That sudden dizziness might return.

These ideas still revolving through his brain, Hoel stopped just by the study door. All at once he heard a sound within. Mr. Kestell was walking up and down his room. This was rather comforting. A man who feels very dizzy does not march about his study. The steps were slow, but regular, like those of a man who is deep in thought. That was well. Hoel decided he had better leave the master of Rushbrook House and go to bed; but, hearing the steps approach nearer, he waited a moment, thinking that he would move softly away when the steps receded. Of course a man does not like to imagine he is being watched, even when he is ill.

Suddenly the study door opened, and Mr. Kestell found

himself face to face with Hoel. The meeting was perfectly unexpected on both sides. Hoel had waited for the steps to die away on the other side of the door, and Mr. Kestell had not heard Hoel outside. He was for the moment entirely off his guard. His usually kind eyes suddenly flashed out an angry, defiant look, his hand trembled visibly, and his voice shook as he said, in a tone of indignation which he did not try to conceal:

"Fenner, what are you doing here? I—I should have thought that you would have respected—"

This word, uttered by himself, brought him to his senses. Like the sudden dying down of a flame, fed by only a few drops of spirits, his eyes fell, and he was speechless.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Kestell," said the astonished Hoel, too much surprised as yet to feel injured by the implied accusation. "I was wanting to know if you had quite recovered from your—indisposition. Elva was anxious that I should wait till you came in, and I did not hear you return from the garden."

"So you have been listening? Thank you; I am quite well now. I was doing a little business, that was all. Pray do not sit up for me. I fancy Jones will be waiting to help you with your bandage."

Hoel Fenner merely replied:

"Yes, of course. Good-night, Mr. Kestell."

"I hope you have all you want," was the courteous reply, and Mr. Kestell was himself again.

This morning, being early awake, Hoel went over all the above scene, and he was utterly puzzled by it. The look of startled anger on that benevolent face seemed to be photographed on Hoel's brain. It was as if a much-trusted dog had turned suddenly round and bitten his master. Mr. Kestell would never have so looked without some reason; and that reason—what was it? Hoel turned the question all ways. He imagined himself in Mr. Kestell's place. He might have been startled, but angry—never. In his place he would have acknowledged that he had been startled, and would have laughed over it. Mr. Kestell was getting on in age, but still he, Hoel, could never have expected such sudden anger in a man whom he had considered the essence of perfect courtesy.

Hoel was led on from this consideration to another, namely, that he must go back to his lodgings. He had,

under the circumstances, made the most of his holiday. He had learned to know Elva better, and, if possible, to appreciate her more; but he sorely missed his London pavement and his work. His arm gave him no pain, and he would soon have it out of its prison. It was easy to get an amanuensis in town, and he must see about a house and a hundred other things before his marriage. The lovers had been putting the date of the wedding more and more forward, till now at last they talked of "soon after Christmas."

Elva said she must spend one more Christmas at home with her father. After that—well, she must learn to live in London, she supposed; but of course this sort of discussion ended in a lover's talk and a little rhapsody. Not that the two were foolishly and demonstratively affectionate. Elva's love was too real for silliness; and Hoel was, perhaps, a little too perfectly free of doubt in his or Elva's affection to have any touch of tender anxiety.

But some cloud-shadow had come over the sunny landscape, and Hoel Fenner went down to breakfast with just the slightest feeling of restraint in his manner, which he hoped did not appear to the outside world. Everything was the same, however. There was the same bright, loving greeting from Elva, and the same gracious kindliness from her father, till Hoel began to ask himself if he had not been dreaming last night before he went to bed. Amice was never demonstrative, and her quietness was not greater than usual.

"Are you better to-day, dear old dad?" said Elva, bending over her father, after the family prayers had been solemnly gone through. "You did not sit up late, I hope. Let me look at you. Hoel, be doctor as well as patient—how do you think papa looks?"

"Don't talk nonsense, child," said Mr. Kestell, laughing softly. "I am quite well. I shall go into Greystone to-day. Your mother seems very bright, and declares she is coming down presently. Any messages at Greystone for you girls? Hoel, what do you think of doing?"

It was no good thinking of last night's episode, and Hoel made an effort to be quite as natural as his host.

"Elva talked of walking up upon the forest road some day. I think to-day would be very pleasant for that expedition. What do you say, mistress mine?"

Hoel was examining his letters, and found one which made him resolve to take advantage of it, and to leave Rushbrook House. It is not often that chance and one's personal wishes can meet each other so happily at the right moment.

"Halloo! by the way, it must be to-day," he added. "Here's my master says I must come up to town unless positively disabled."

"Oh, Hoel, and we have so many more things to do, and so many people who would like to see you. The squire said you were to go to Court Garden as soon as ever you could."

"And what about Doctor Pink's leave? You will have to obtain that," put in Mr. Kestell, opening the "Times."

"I can easily run down again, for now I am certainly accident-proof; I never heard of a man being in two railway accidents in his life; and the law of chance is dead against it. Perhaps I ought to go to-day, but I think I'll wire that I can not come till to-morrow. And my landlady will require notice; she will be very much grieved, Elva, at my coming back an engaged man, for I shall immediately look about for a house."

"I must bring the girls up to town some day, I suppose, when you wish for the future Mrs. Fenner's sanction to your choice. Eh, Elva? I shall put off the evil day as long as I can. But we old people must learn resignation."

"We can't spare her yet," said Amice, looking up with a troubled look in her eyes; only at this moment did she seem again to realize a little what the loss would be to her.

Hoel seemed to breathe more freely now that he had decided to go back to town; why, he could not even explain to himself. The rest of the breakfast was occupied by discussion of plans, and of various London localities. Even Amice joined in. No stranger would have noticed the least restraint in manner or word among any of the party.

The pony-carriage was ordered to come round early. It was a long drive, but the day was fine, and the lovers looked forward to perfect peace, for the groom was to drive them to the foot of the hills, and then leave them to walk home alone, so there was nothing to mar the prospect.

Elva hurried hither and thither, making preparations, such as filling a sandwich-tin, in case they forgot luncheon-

time, and as she flitted about here, there, and everywhere, she seemed like the sunshine of the old house.

Hoel retired to the library, wrote some letters with his left hand, and admired himself for learning this new art so quickly, and then indulged in a cigar and a novel, and made a few notes for an article on the merits of the novelist. He was finishing this mental essay when the door opened behind him. It was Elva come to summon him, he supposed, and he said, happily:

"All right, I'm ready. I say, Elva, what—"

"Ah, it's you, Hoel. I hear the brougham coming round for me."

Mr. Kestell came forward, and Hoel started up and stood with his back to the fire-place, which attitude seems to help a masculine brain to overcome unexpected difficulties.

"I am going to Greystone; I shall not be back till four o'clock. Don't overdo yourself. That arm is not quite the thing yet, you know." Mr. Kestell, receiving no answer, cleared his throat a little, then continued: "By the way, how you startled me last night. I was coming out to look for Jones, and, my dear fellow, I am afraid I spoke just a little hastily."

Hoel felt as if he were the culprit, as we often do when our elders apologize.

"Of course, sir, it was a slight mistake. I know Elva was a good deal alarmed by the indisposition of which you complained."

"Yes, yes, it was most kind of you to be anxious. So you really think you must leave us to-morrow?"

"Yes, I must do so."

"But you will come as often as you can before the wedding. Indeed, Fenner, I can not let you leave us without telling you again how entirely I can trust my child into your hands—entirely. If I were to consult my own wishes I should wish to keep her as long as possible with me; but I can truly say, her happiness comes first. Long engagements are trying to all persons concerned; so I repeat, as soon as your arrangements can be made I will give up my child."

Hoel's feelings of resentment suddenly disappeared. Such kindness was most unusual.

"Elva thought the first week in January would—"

"Well, yes; let us settle it so. Now I won't keep you

from her. I must not keep the brougham waiting. Good-bye."

Mr. Kestell smiled and retired, and Hoel said, with a little sigh of relief: "One could hardly believe the two expressions to belong to the same man. However, 'All's well that ends well.'"

When they had sent away the carriage the lovers were quite happy.

It was a perfect day for a walk on these lovely moors, and Hoel seemed carried out of his usual ultra-intellectual sphere, and, for once, to catch some of Elva's spirit of Nature worship.

"Darling," he whispered, "these surroundings appear to belong to you exclusively. I seem always to fancy you with this exquisite background. I shall blame myself for taking you away from it to my dingy London."

Elva gazed and gazed at the late autumn landscape, as if she were trying to say good-bye to it.

"There is something better than Nature, Hoel, and though I do love it from the bottom of my heart, I know the love of one human soul is far greater."

Soon succeeded the silence of happiness, as the two, leaving the sandy road with varied shades of red and yellow plunged into gorse and heather, dotted with an occasional oasis of short, sweet grass. What richness of color there was here! Now a brown furrow, then a bit of silver-sanded path, next a little patch of boggy ground lying near a great hole where sand had been dug out.

Then they turned into a lane which wound itself between woods, plantations, and fields; and every now and then a vista of brown hills and blue distance came in sight.

Further on they reached a cluster of tall pines, which towered high above the many little Christmas trees, as Hoel called the smaller Scotch firs. The red stems rose many feet, and, together with some of lesser height, inclined all in one direction, as if winter storms had long ago beaten them down when they were young and tender, until they could now no more straighten themselves.

They rested a little in this sheltered spot, and their talk turned on mundane matters of houses, and how the spring should be spent; and whether, when the summer came, Hoel should take his wife to Switzerland.

"You have so much to see, Elva; and when you have

traveled a little, your mind will view everything in a broader way."

"Shall I see things in a broader way? But will anything be really more beautiful than our forest? Don't you think that that landscape is most beautiful round which one's most numerous thoughts are intwined? I remember now the exact spot, by the brink of the third Pool, where I suddenly realized the meaning of 'Speech is but broken light upon the depth of the unspoken.' The sun broke out all at once on a bit of the glassy water, and then I knew exactly what that meant."

"But traveling," said Hoel, making a trite remark without knowing it (though often universally received sayings hide much deeper truths), "widens the mind, and educates everybody."

"I suppose it does; and yet Mrs. Eagle Bennison has been nearly everywhere, but I have never heard her make one remark which has not come out of a guide-book."

They now began to ascend toward the high table-land whither they were bound. In the distance was a small cottage, the last limit of cultivation in any sense of the word. Above that was only to be seen the lonely, heather-clad forest land.

"Who lives there?" asked Hoel, as, with a plodding patience, they waded knee-deep in heather.

Elva looked up, and noticed a figure nearing the cottage. Her heart beat a little faster, but she would not betray that she recognized Walter Akister. She had never met him since her engagement had been made public property, and she remembered too well his look on the day of the accident.

"Kelly Sandhay, the man's name is; he works for a farmer on the other side of the ridge. We need not pass it, if you don't mind further wading through this sea of heather."

"But the path beyond it looks better walking," said Hoel; and Elva assented.

She took care to say nothing about that solitary figure, and, happily, it was soon hidden by the cottage itself. But, partly because of her anxiety, she caught her foot on one of the many brown furrows, and fell, tearing her skirt.

"How stupid of me!" she said, as Hoel helped her up with tender solicitations about her foot. "And I believe I

have no pins. If Amice were here she would have a dozen in her pocket. Neither have you, Hoel," she continued, as she examined, with a happy laugh, the back of his coat-collar. "That is a bad omen for our future thriftiness. I saw a pin this morning, and I meant to pick it up. Do you remember that French story, 'L'Histoire d'une Epingle?' I know riches and honor fell to the lot of the picker-up of that pin!"

"I'll run on to the cottage and beg you a few. I suppose there is a Mrs. Sandhay? You can't walk far in this tall heather if you have to hold up these elegant garments."

Elva would have infinitely preferred to keep away from the cottage; but Hoel insisted, so she sat down on a ridge and said she would wait for him. As he started forward Elva heard the furious barking of a dog, but thought nothing of it, seeing that it dragged a chain behind it; poachers were plentiful in this wild district, and watch-dogs were necessary to the farmers. If only Walter had gone on, thought Elva. But she could not see him on the higher path, where he ought to have been by this time. She was seized by a most unusual nervous trembling, and stood intently watching Hoel's figure as he approached the house. The dog barked furiously, and pulled at his chain, and Elva wondered what would happen if such a fierce specimen of the canine race were to get loose. This thought made her resolve to go on, so she walked quickly toward the cottage. She would meet Hoel as he came out. How stupid of her not to have gone with him. At this moment, when she was within a hundred yards of the cottage, the dog's chain suddenly gave way, and as if Elva had specially offended him by her cautious approach, he bounded toward her, barking furiously.

Elva uttered a little cry, not audible, however, on account of the loud barking, but, notwithstanding, she stood her ground. It was impossible to run in the thick heather. And where could she run to?

"Hoel!" she called, but whether or not her cry reached him, she did not know, for she was too much alarmed now to think further.

Suddenly another figure seemed to spring up as if from the ground, and, just as the dog bounded upon her and seized her dress, a powerful hand collared him, and tried to hold him back—succeeded for a moment, but then the

enraged brute turned upon Elva's deliverer and bit the hand that held him.

"Walter," she cried, "let go!"

For Walter Akister, with courage rarely surpassed, again seized the dog, and this time grasped it firmly with his left hand, then with a weighted stick, he struck the animal with such force and such a well-directed blow, that it fell senseless to the ground. Walter paused a moment to take breath, as Elva, seizing her handkerchief, tried to bind up his bleeding hand. He mechanically folded the slight white cambric round the wound.

"Oh, does it hurt very much? How good, how brave of you," murmured Elva. "I—I— There is Mr. Fenner coming. He—how shall I thank you?"

"Pshaw!" said Walter, with lowering brows; "the pain is nothing. I shall go and put it under the pump. The brute won't do it again. It was fortunate I was here. Your—lover was not very near at hand, when his presence would have been useful."

Elva colored; anger and gratitude strove together. The struggle was visible in her face.

"How can you say such a thing?" she said, defiantly. "I am grateful for your help; but—if Hoel had been here it would not have been needed."

"Indeed! Well, good-bye. Here he comes."

"Don't go; please, don't go. Your hand must be seen to. Come into the cottage."

Hoel, breathless and troubled, now came running up.

"Good heavens! What's this? Here is the owner. Elva, are you hurt? Mr. Akister, I fear—"

"It's nothing to make such a fuss over," said Walter, striding toward the cottage, and, meeting the farmer, he had a few words with him.

"Hoel, he saved my life," said Elva, putting her hand into Hoel's arm and feeling now, for the first time, that her limbs were trembling; "at least, I mean—"

"Nonsense; nothing of the kind. The brute must be shot, of course; but Mr. Akister only did what any one else would have done."

Hoel was secretly much annoyed at having, as it seemed, been out of the way at the moment of danger; annoyed still more at his place having been usurped by that unmannerly bear, Walter Akister. Neither was he mollified

by seeing that he ought, in duty bound, to go and see after the welfare of the bitten hand.

The farmer now came running up from a neighboring field accompanied by a laborer; and Hoel expressed his indignation at such a savage dog being kept on the premises. In the meanwhile, Elva hastily followed Walter into the cottage, and found him bathing his hand with cold water.

"Oh, Walter, let me help you," she said.

"No," he answered, fiercely. "Look here, Elva Kestell. I only want one thing of you, and that you have given to some one else. You reject what has been yours for years; is yours; and always will be. But, pshaw! what does it matter to you now? You have what you want, I suppose. As to this wound, it is nothing. It is not the first time a dog has bitten me."

A woman can not altogether be indifferent to a man who has done her a great service; and Elva, in a softened tone, said:

"Walter, please don't take things amiss. You know I never imagined or guessed that you—I mean what you said—till you told me; and, then—how is it my fault?"

"Some day you may be glad to know I am always the same," he said, in a low voice, for now Hoel's step was heard. "All you can say or do will not alter me. Some day you may understand that. Now pray do not trouble your head further about this."

"No, no, please, Walter, do not speak in this way. Find some one you can love, and who loves you. Forget, please, forget me. I—"

"You—oh, yes, you are satisfied, you mean to say. What idiots women are sometimes; they do not understand what is for their happiness."

"Elva!" Hoel was entering the cottage, while the tone of his voice betrayed some annoyance.

"Yes. Oh, Hoel, come, see if you can do anything for Mr. Akister."

Walter turned round and scowled at Elva.

"Do you think I would accept anything from him—him? In that case, Elva, you do not understand. I need not have expected you to do so, however. All women are alike in that."

Hoel heard the words, but was too much surprised to say

anything at first; and, before he could get over his astonishment, Walter Akister was striding down the hill, and was soon lost to sight behind a hillock.

"We may as well go on to our destination," said Hoel, "that is, if you are not tired, Elva?"

"Oh, I am not a bit tired," she answered; and, after a few words to the woman, who came in to offer sympathy and counsel, the two walked out in silence. When they were nearing the top where the fir-trees round the clump were known as Hawk's Nest, Hoel paused. He was certainly annoyed, and Elva saw that he was not altogether pleased by Walter's speech.

"Tell me," he said, suddenly, "what does all this mean about Walter Akister? Have you—"

Hoel paused. The very idea that Elva had trifled or flirted with some one else was unbearable. He had believed he was her first and only love. Elva wished now she had mentioned the subject before; but her own pride was touched. The color came to her cheeks; and, if Hoel had looked, he would have seen how beautiful she appeared when excited.

"Walter Akister has known me for years, and it was just when you first came here that he told me he loved me. How could I help that?"

"He would not have dared to tell you, Elva, if you had not—given him some—"

Elva drew herself up to her full height. This action was quite unconscious. It was simply the result of a feeling of pride at Hoel's even doubting her. She loved him too much, however, to allow her pride to shelter itself behind silence.

"Please, dear Hoel, do not say any more. You know that I have given my love but once only—that has been to you."

"Yes; but you said then you were not always of the same opinion; that you were not sure of your moods. If I could doubt—"

"Hoel, please don't be silly." This time Elva laughed. Clever, sensible, superior in every way as was her lover, he could yet say a foolish thing. "I told you before that I can not help Walter Akister's loving me and behaving in this bearish manner; but—well, I suppose I am sorry for him, nothing more. Now let us talk of something else."

They did so; but this last walk had lost its perfect beauty. On both sides one little note had jarred.

CHAPTER IX.

IN LONDON ON BUSINESS.

BEFORE Mr. Kestell drove off to Greystone, he went upstairs to his wife's boudoir. Symee was there, just preparing her luncheon. Mrs. Kestell was sitting by the fire, looking so young and handsome, that it needed no great effort of imagination on the part of her husband to remember the courting-time.

"Well, Symee," he said, noticing, as he frequently did, with kind words his wife's confidential maid, "have you heard lately from your brother?"

Symee raised a gentle, pale face up to her master.

"No, sir, not very lately. Since he left he seems so changed, and does not like writing letters; but he does his work as usual. Perhaps it is rather a busy time at his office."

"Yes, I am sure it is. You are a good friend to your brother, Symee; the best he has."

Symee had retired toward the door, and in answer smiled gratefully at her master. His words were balm to her heart; for she often grieved secretly about Jesse. Yes, he was changed; and she put down the change to her refusal to live with him.

Mrs. Kestell was altogether more genial and sympathetic now to her husband. This was caused by the excitement of Elva's wedding; for otherwise her life had flowed on without a want or a care, almost without an untoward event. All trouble was kept from her, owing to her fancied ill-health.

"So you are off, Josiah. Are you sure it will not hurt you? I don't think Pink understands you at all; he didn't understand my case in the least."

"Yes, dear, I am much better. I saw the young people off just now on their expedition. I think we shall be told they make a very handsome bridal pair. Still, Elva does not come up to her mother."

He stooped down and kissed the hair which showed so few silvery threads.

"I was certainly the best looking of our family; but my

sisters were so vain that they were always telling me I was nothing to look at."

"I undeceived you there, I think," Mr. Kestell smiled. That courting-time was so full of happy remembrances, that it seemed only like yesterday; and yet, here was his elder daughter going to be married.

"The first week in January," he said, suddenly. "There is really nothing to wait for, is there?"

"Oh, nothing; and lovers are a little tiresome after a time. Elva will miss the country; the girls have been so spoiled. Very different from the Fitzgerald girls, who were brought up so strictly that they had no ideas of their own now. I am sure our system was much the best; and the proof is that a very rising man, who has the pick of London society, selects Elva, and falls in love with her at first sight."

Mrs. Kestell's system had been the *laisser faire*, not from choice, but because she had no authority over her girls. Mr. Kestell knew this well enough; but he would not have contradicted his wife for the world.

"Yes, dear, you are quite right; the proof of any system is in the result, and the result in Elva is perfect."

"And in Amice, too. You don't understand all her good points. She is quite the comfort of my life when I can't have Symee. By the way, Josiah, you will never allow Symee to go away, will you?" Mrs. Kestell looked up at her husband in a confiding manner, and with a troubled look in her eyes.

"Of course not, dear. Your comfort, you know, has always been my first thought."

A dim ray pierced the nearly ossified brain of Mrs. Kestell, and that ray showed her the long years of faithful devotion, the perfect kindness and goodness of the husband, whom her own people had made a favor of accepting as one of the family. She held out her well-shaped, delicate hand with a very sweet smile on her lips.

"Yes, dear, your devotion has been the great blessing of my life. How could I have lived through so much illness and suffering without it?"

"Thank you, darling," he whispered, stooping down; and these thanks came from the bottom of his heart.

The pause that followed, during which he kissed the hand and the unwrinkled forehead of his wife, seemed to

him like stepping into a new Garden of Eden, as if he had suddenly come upon a beautiful oasis in an arid desert.

Still feeling this, he walked away to the door.

"Good-bye, darling. Take great care of yourself till I come back. I will call Symee."

One more look at his wife, and then he was gone, and very soon Amice, from her window, saw the brougham drive off to Greystone. To her the horses' hoofs upon the gravel seemed to say: "Who was John Pellew? Who was John Pellew?" till the sound ceased in the distance.

Mr. Kestell did not drive straight to his office, but made a détour to the inn, where Button still lay, neither much better nor much worse. In answer to Mr. Kestell's inquiries, mine host, who came to the door, answered that there seemed to be a turn for the worse this morning, and that the doctor who had called had looked a bit grave. Mr. Kestell quickly slipped a sovereign into an envelope, and asked the landlord to give it to the invalid. After which gracious act of charity he drove off, saying aloud to himself—why, he knew not, as surely thinking it would have served the purpose:

"Poor fellow! I feel he will only drink it. But he expects it of me, I am sure he does; and one does not like to disappoint an invalid."

When he reached his office, he dismissed his carriage. This office was, in fact, the lower story of a large, substantial, red-brick Queen Anne house, in the upper part of which his partner lived; for the Kestells had for years been inhabitants of this house before the great rise in wealth which had made this present Kestell of Greystone a county man.

Mr. Kestell now appeared to be in a great hurry; he had an interview with his partner, quickly, well, and wisely settled a few difficult business details, and then said he should not stay longer to-day, and that he was not to be expected next day. He wrote a telegram, which he put into an envelope, and told a clerk to take it to the post-office in the afternoon; after which, Mr. Kestell walked away, and went to the railway-station.

He took his ticket for London, and choosing an empty first-class carriage, he bribed the porter to lock him in. "He wished to do a little business in quiet," he remarked.

This business must have been purely mental, for when

the train moved on, Mr. Kestell folded his hands, and hardly moved all the way to town. Once he murmured: "I fear I can not get home this evening; but Celia will get the telegram. I have done such a thing before—yes, when we were involved in that bank failure, I stayed away all night. She will not think anything of it. Poor darling! How like her old self she was this morning. Yes, everything is worth while for her—everything."

Mr. Kestell, once in London, recovered his energy. He did not even wait, as he often had done before, to help a distressed female to get her luggage. More than once the benevolence of his countenance had caused him to be appealed to by single ladies, who would have confided even their purses to such a man. And, in truth, never had his help been asked in vain. More than one old maid told stories about "That very kind gentleman who was so good to me."

There was no time to-day, however, for outside philanthropy. He took a cab, and drove at once to the business place of Card & Lilley, sent in his name, and was soon admitted into the private room of Mr. Card. Lilley had somehow been swallowed up by Card, who, however, still kindly advertised his non-existent partner.

Mr. Kestell knew Jesse did not work in the room visitors went through, so he did not expect to see him; indeed, after the first preliminary civilities, and the usual sympathetic confidences about the past, present, and future weather, he at once said:

"Is Vicary still with you?"

"Yes, certainly; we should have advised you of it had he left."

Mr. Card always said "we" in loving memory of Lilley.

"Yes, of course, I know; but still in the press of business things are forgotten. I came here to consult you about him."

"After the handsome premium you paid for him, he is, I hope, giving you no trouble."

"Well, I don't quite say that. However, young men must be young men; and lately I have detected signs of restlessness in him. I have talked very seriously to him about it; but you know, if once the spirit of roving gets

into a young fellow, he is not fit for much steady work afterward."

"Yes, yes, certainly," said Mr. Card, rubbing his hands slowly; "but I wonder we have seen nothing of it. However, you know, Mr. Kestell, there is no lack of clerks at present. The applications are a perfect nuisance; so, if you wish in any way—"

"No, no, I don't wish," put in Mr. Kestell. "I am only thinking of your interests. I am going to see him to-day, and if I find him still bent on roving, why, I shall not refuse him my sanction any longer."

"It is very good of you, I am sure; the fellow ought to be ashamed of disappointing you. Still, I must say he does his work well and intelligently. Indeed, we half thought we should raise him; but, if you say he has other ideas, that will not be worth while."

"Thank you; I will do my best to make him see reason. Say nothing to him about my visit. It might only make him more obstinate."

"Of course not, Mr. Kestell."

Then the two men for a few minutes plunged into a business talk, after which Mr. Kestell very soon took his leave.

"Strange that Kestell of Greystone should bother himself about that Vicary," thought Mr. Card when his visitor had gone. "The young man must be a fool if he throws up his chance. Something behind it, I suppose," and not troubling himself to consider the question, Mr. Card resumed his work. If Vicary threw up his situation, he would of course lose, as it were, the benefit of the original premium. That, however, was nothing to Mr. Card; and clerks could be had in plenty.

Mr. Kestell next consulted his watch; he had yet some other business to do, and waiving the question of lunch, he took a cab, and called at several colonial emigration offices and land companies. Here he informed himself about matters concerning the taking up of land, and of buying farms; took away a goodly heap of printed matter of information on these various subjects; and then, hot and weary, he at last reached his club, and ordered an early dinner.

"I had better go and see Vicary to-night," he thought, "and have the thing over at once."

Quite unconscious of the coming visitor, Jesse reached

his lodgings this evening with that clock-like regularity as to time, which made 'Liza say:

"Mr. Vicary he is a regular gentleman, and never keeps the kettle boiling over for his tea, as some people does."

There was a great alteration, however, in Jesse now, since his return from the country; a change which showed itself in little things, which would have told any tender, careful watcher that he, Jesse, was passing through a time of intense mental suffering. But there was no one to note these little signs, and Jesse had to get through it as best he could in silence.

He was quite used to a rough life; that was nothing to him. Before this, on coming home, his bounding step, his cheerful greeting to 'Liza, all told of hope; but now these signs were gone; something had taken its place, and that something was a mechanical and dogged perseverance in a work which was not congenial to him.

This particular evening Jesse had felt the power of this demon of hopelessness strong upon him. There were two natures fighting within him, and the fight was all the more powerful and terrible because, till that fatal evening, Jesse had had a strong belief in himself and his own power. It was not conceit, because it was founded on a firm trust and belief in God, a belief founded on the experience of his youth; but, nevertheless, though he still clung tenaciously to his faith, the hour of temptation had come to him, as it comes to every man, and the battle of life had to be fought. On the loss of the battle, or on its victory, it is not too much to say depended all Jesse Vicary's future higher life. And the battle was not a question of hours, but of many days. Already now had he spent many an hour in his small room fighting with evil thoughts, as if they represented evil spirits, and were tangibly there before him.

Shame is the hardest trial for man to bear—shame, that is, that is felt; and shame had seized upon Jesse with a deadly power. He had been able to tread the path of poverty, and to see sin around him, and to know that he despised it; now as he went his habitual round, he seemed to be followed by a lurid light which mocked God's sunlight, and which showed him sin under a new form.

"Thou art no better than these," said a mocking fiend, "no better than these, except by chance. Thou, too, art

an outcast in the great, cold, cruel world—a mere uncared-for unit, and not a member of the beautiful patriarchal family which has raised, through a series of spiritual evolutions, human beings from the level of the brute creation. With all thy pretensions, thy high thoughts, thy self-sufficiency, thou art no better than these outcasts."

Again and again had the poor fellow thrown himself on his knees, and wondered if his religion were on a par with his former pride, a mere sham? Had it been built up by reason of his respectability, and like a house of cards, easily blown down by the breath of public opinion? Or was it something deeper—more real than this?

He wanted the answer, and the answer came not; so that, suddenly rising, unable to lift his mind higher than himself, he would once more begin his round of reasoning. In fair weather how easy he had found it, how powerful had been his anger against scoffers, and now—ah, well, his punishment had come. Even doubts crowded in; doubts which had seemed so easy to refute before; doubts which he had again and again argued with others, and his arguments had proved powerful. But now what irony of fate was this, that all his past words rose up and laughed him to scorn, while his answers looked more like gossamer creations, which a breath could blow away?

When he went out to visit his friends in the street, or sat as before near Obed Diggings's daughter, all his power of comforting seemed gone away. Even Obed's gaunt figure, and his infirmities, not caused by teetotalism, began to appear natural to Jesse. Why had he fancied before that he could reform any one? Was it not a case of "Physician, heal thyself?"

Now and then, at rare intervals, however, Jesse had a flash of different and less desponding thoughts.

With the loss of what he had deemed dearest and best, he had lost much motive power; but, after all, where lay his fault? The sin of the parent is to be visited upon the children; but does that visitation imply any disparagement of the child? Surely not. To his own Maker he standeth or falleth; and has not every man the right to ask and to claim justice from his Maker?

"I have no birthright," thought Jesse, during one of these happier moments; "but God gave me the right to

live and the right to ask for justice. I believe, I believe in the right. God help me."

Jesse grasped this belief with a thanksgiving felt, not uttered; for true belief, that belief which is the only one worth having, is rare, it must be a heavenly gift, so wonderful and powerful is it, and, if denied, some great purpose must be meant to be answered by its absence.

Then, all at once, Jesse lost it again, a curtain was let down and hid it from him; but still his first germ of hope lay in the thought: "The other day I had it. The truth shone out, and for a short time I grasped it."

A very small comfort, however, when the battle had to be fought again; when the motive power of life seemed worth nothing; when vague notions and strange temptations crowded in, and he asked himself: "Why not try to enjoy those pleasures in which others have found some compensation for ruined lives?"

This evening, on his way home, a passer-by had put into his hand a paper on "Individual Liberty." Jesse had lost some of that healthy curiosity of anything new which makes men clear and correct in discriminative judgment. He glanced at it, and read some of the paragraphs on Taxes and Rates, and the Evils of Governments. He was not much interested with all this; but on the last page he found a few lines which caught his attention:

"Peace, happiness, progress can only exist on one condition, that men are not struggling for this hateful power over each other, that they desire to be free themselves, and to allow all others to be free."

"What is freedom?" he said to himself. "Did I not once believe it to be a firm standing-ground in the world, from which one could climb above others? That standing-ground is gone, and I imagine the climbing to be impossible, and feel that I must stay at the bottom among the common herd. But was that freedom? Suppose there should be another kind of freedom, the freedom from all ambition centered in self? But, without ambition, how is good work to be done? Can there be selfless ambition? May not there be a spiritual level which has not one connecting link with the material? In that case, may I not look for it even in Golden Sparrow Street?"

Had not he, all his life, inseparably associated the spirit-

ual with the material, made the one utterly dependent on the other? Had his first basis been utterly wrong? On the other hand, might not the one be merely a result, nay, a necessary result of the other?

It was a new thought, and with a smile of pleasure Jesse rang the bell for 'Liza to take away his tea things.

"Shall you be going out, Mister Vicary?" asked the little maid, who had also, long ago, given up country ideals of a clean face, and was content to be a resting-place for smuts.

"No, 'Liza, not to-night; I think I'll do some work at home."

The tea things having disappeared, however, Jesse sat down by his small fire, and did not work; Symee's decision had taken the heart out of his after-hours study; he knew that, in time, he should relapse into the clerk pure and simple, a slavish machine with a contracting instead of expanding brain. With a little sigh of impatience he heard 'Liza's step again. Her affectionate regard was, at times, aggravating.

"If you please, Mr. Vicary, there's a visitor for you; shall I show him up? He's a gentleman."

"It's Mr. Hoel Fenner," said Jesse to himself, with a sudden gleam of gratitude, for Hoel had not made a sign since Jesse had rejected his offer.

"Yes."

'Liza shuffled down, and soon threw open the door again, to usher in—Mr. Kestell!

All the fierce storm of days past burst forth again in Jesse's inner spirit, but outwardly he merely behaved as was befitting his position and that of his visitor.

CHAPTER X.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

"My dear Vicary," said Mr. Kestell, taking the proffered chair, and trying to be quite natural; a somewhat difficult task when both men had such a vivid recollection of their last interview.

Make believe is always painful to some natures: but it is far more painful if the person we are trying to deceive is conscious of our effort.

Was Jesse conscious that Mr. Kestell's perfect ease was

put on? This question the latter would have paid several sovereigns to have had answered.

"My dear Vicary, I am glad to catch you at home. I was half afraid that after the day's hard work you might, like other young men, and very naturally, too, have gone to the pit of a theater, and I should have had my journey here for nothing. Still, knowing you as I do, I might have guessed otherwise. How are you? Have you repented of your repentance? I was really sorry you were so resolute about that offer of Mr. Fenner's; I quite came round to your way of thinking."

"I have not repented of my repentance," said Jesse, without a smile on his face. Evidently, he was in no mood for suavity. Mr. Kestell was sorry to see the change in him. It was very evident to his keen eye. He altered his tone:

"Now, Vicary, let us be honest with each other. I mean that I want you to speak quite openly with me. You mistook some things I said hastily. You have, in consequence, made a false step. Pure imaginary conduct and reasoning seldom bring satisfactory action. I hear from Hoel Fenner that the post you rejected has been offered and accepted by some one else. I am sorry for it. You had a chance and lost it."

Mr. Kestell was feeling his way, and forgot to add a sentence about his own original strong objection to Jesse's accepting the offer.

"It is best as it is," said Jesse, simply. He hated to have that matter raked up again, for it reminded him of the blighting and death of his manly pride.

"You acted hastily, and I fear you will regret it. I feel sure you will, Jesse. This has greatly distressed me. I can not tell you how much I have felt it, and I have—as I was in London, I mean—I have been hatching a little scheme which will be, as newspaper advertisements say, greatly to your advantage."

Jesse was so easily swayed by kindness that all at once he tried to get over the tone of sulky reticence he had adopted.

"It is very kind of you, sir; but, after all, one thing may be as good as another. I have become so accustomed to my work at the office that it is no trouble to me, and I can improve myself at home by study. I have not done

much since I came back to town: but I shall begin again soon. I hope Symee is well."

"Yes, Symee is well; quite the comfort of our lives." Mr. Kestell looked round the poor, shabby room. "And really I think her decision was wise; yes, wise for both your sakes."

This subject lay too near Jesse's heart to evoke any light response.

"She thought so, and there the matter ended."

"There you are again, Vicary, taking things too much to heart. You want change of scene and occupation; and now let me unfold my little plan. Would you like to emigrate, Vicary? A chance, such as I am not likely to meet with again, has occurred. A very desirable homestead has come into my possession. I mean, that if I can find a man who will take it from me, working it and paying me a small rent, I shall give it up to him. In three years the farm and land will become the tenant's property. Suppose you found things pretty comfortable at this Regina Farm, you might send for Symee. How does this strike you? You are fond of the country and of country life, and you are strong and energetic—just the sort of man to get on famously in Canada. This North-west territory is becoming quite popular, I believe. As to your journey, I could get you a free passage, having some friends among the ship-owners."

Mr. Kestell paused and looked at Jesse attentively; but the small lamp did not give a very good light, and he could not be sure of the effect of his speech.

Had Mr. Kestell come yesterday most likely Jesse would have joyfully closed with the offer; it would have been to him a way of throwing over all his past life, and beginning again with a firm determination to bury all the romance and all the noble thought of his youth and boyhood, and to go where one name was as good as another, never mind what past history he brought with him.

But only now had this new idea come to him. All his life he had associated the spiritual and the material; but just as this old truth, that these had nothing to do with each other, had vaguely come to him, the temptation was held out to him in a new form. He might go away and begin again a new material life, and join to it a new spiritual existence. He could, in fact, do what people call be-

gin again. But why should he? Was it not another form of cowardice? Why should he leave his friends in Golden Sparrow Street? Why, because he could no longer view their relative position in the same light, should he throw up all his high schemes for good and go to a new world, where the chief attraction would be himself and his own welfare, and where, in the solitude of a Canadian farm, he could brood over wrongs which he could not help?

All this flashed through his brain, not in definite words, but like a new creed, a revelation of a higher power. It was not the death of his gloomy thoughts; but it was, perhaps, the germ of the higher element in man's being.

"I can not fly from myself," he thought; "even there, these thoughts would follow me; and, besides, I should have been a coward—I should have acted as if all my past life and my past ideas of doing some good to my fellow-creatures were a sham. They may be; but I must be sure of this first. It is too early to give up the struggle; too soon to acknowledge I am conquered by the knowledge that I am myself an outcast from the society of honest men, who care about a good and an honest name. Why should not a man make his own name, even if the struggle is hard? No, I do not care now for fame; ambition seems a worthless thing, and Symee will not share my poverty or my wealth."

Strong and clear came the conviction now that his post was here in these confined lodgings, and in Golden Sparrow Street.

There had been a pause after Mr. Kestell had made his proposal, a pause which the old man had respected, watching keenly the face before him. He could not guess the working of Jesse's mind, but he saw a half smile gradually form itself on the lips that had before been so sternly pressed together.

"He will accept," thought Mr. Kestell, with a sigh of relief. "All will still be well."

The result, however, was far different from his expectation.

"Thank you, Mr. Kestell, I am deeply grateful. If you had come yesterday, I would have said yes; to-day, from reasons which I will not trouble you with, I say no. But I am none the less grateful; the very knowledge of your kindness will help me—does help me, to say no. It gives

me courage to stick to the old country, and to bear my misfortune like a man."

Mr. Kestell listened to these words in sheer amazement; half of it he could not understand. What he did take in was, that if he had come yesterday, Jesse would have said yes. Was even chance against him? Was he now, after all these years of care for this youth, was he to have him turn against him? What was he saying or thinking? What did Jesse mean? It was pure nonsense; he must accept this offer.

"You would have accepted it yesterday, but not to-day. What do you mean, Vicary? Think of your sister."

Mr. Kestell saw what a mistake he had made in not bringing with him a letter from Symee, promising to join her brother in three years.

This appeal, however, had not the desired effect. A sudden flush overspread Vicary's face. He had by no means yet learned patience and humility.

"My sister has refused, sir, through your influence, to come and join me here, it is not likely I shall ask her to come and rough it on a lonely Canadian farm. Symee has chosen; I shall not ask her again."

Mr. Kestell was circumvented by his own precautions, and that by a young fellow whose proceedings had been perfectly straightforward.

"You refuse this offer?"

"Yes, sir, entirely. I shall never think better of it."

"We shall see," thought Mr. Kestell to himself. Aloud, he added:

"Well, it's no use saying anything more. I only hope Card & Lilley will be always able to give you work. There is a general falling off of business just now."

Jesse did not attach any importance to this last remark —indeed, he hardly noticed it; he was thinking that, come what might, he would try and find a new path in the old ways.

"Thank you for coming here with your offer," repeated Jesse, wishing Mr. Kestell would go away, and yet taking himself to task for his ingratitude.

Mr. Kestell waved his hand slightly, as if to refuse all thanks; he never had been one who expected expressions of gratitude—indeed, in an indirect manner he had rejected

them. He now took up his hat, cast his eyes around the room, and rose to go.

"Good-bye, Vicary. I hope you will never have to repent of your somewhat hasty resolutions; remember, I shall not repeat this offer."

"Of course not; I do not expect it, sir."

"Very well. Good-evening, good-evening."

Jesse was standing up, too. From his greater height he could look down upon the slightly shorter man, whom all his life he had considered as the arbitrator of his fate. All that feeling seemed now to vanish forever; he was free, he had not accepted this last favor; but had voluntarily chosen a less easy path. He was free, he could say anything now, and quite suddenly a great rush of joy filled his brain, and out of this chaos of joy and pain, though the joy of freedom predominated, he was impelled to ask a question. It was not premeditated, it was entirely spontaneous, and, without preface, he looked boldly into Mr. Kestell's face, with the gaze of earnest inquiry, in which pride was no longer visible, and said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Kestell, one moment. There is a question I must put to you. You know all my history, you know the secret of my unhappy birth. Tell me honestly who was my father?"

A livid hue seemed to spread over Mr. Kestell's face; the living light which most eyes reflect and which appears to us to be the symbol of the soul, died down. He did not lower his eyes; on the contrary, as if by force of will, he remained gazing at Jesse, with one hand still on the handle of the door and the other holding his hat.

"Why does he not answer?" thought Jesse, hotly, the lower motive of passionate impatience at his lot gaining the mastery. "Why does he look like this? Good heavens! what is the mystery? It can be of little importance to this rich man." Then a terrible suspicion swept over him; only long habits of respect prevented him from seizing the old man by the arm and compelling him to answer; as it was, he repeated fiercely:

"Mr. Kestell, if you know, I, too, have a right to know."

"I—I can not tell you, Vicary," was the answer; and before Jesse could do more than make one step forward, Mr. Kestell was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

THICK DARKNESS.

WITH his head sunk on the table, Jesse remained for a long time trying to calm himself. It seemed as if, in that moment of question and answer between the two men, the devil had taken possession of him. All the noble thoughts which had filled his mind, and which had been the cause of his rejection of Mr. Kestell's offer, were suddenly swept away, only a raging feeling of anger against the so-called benefactor was left behind. But Jesse did nothing; he did not even try to follow him except in imagination; and in this imaginary picture he seized him by the throat, and bade him, as he valued his life, stand and deliver his secret.

"It is a bad one, or he would not have looked like that. He is implicated in it. What a fool, what an idiot I have been not to see this before! Why has he spent his money on me since my childhood? Philanthropy! curse the word, it does not exist. The man who can look as he did this moment can have none, none, none. Yet it is this man under whose roof Symee has lived her useless life, under his roof— Good heavens! Ah!—I can see it now, the thread of the whole plot. This benevolence, this anxiety for my welfare, it has been all a plot to hide his own sins. Hypocrite, thousand times hypocrite, he wishes me now to go to Canada, away from the old country, away from him. This offer—why, it was all a plant, most likely. He has bought this farm, and wishes really to give it to me as my inheritance—to give it to me, to me. No, by Heaven, never! not a penny of his money shall I ever touch again. Yes, I see it all as clear as the sunshine. This very work I am doing, is it honestly got? Well, that must be honest, in spite of him. I give the worth and more than the worth of my money."

He experienced a moment of relief at this one thought of something clear and honest. The misery he had endured in the past seemed as nothing when compared with this. He had looked into the abyss before. Now he clearly saw it. He was in it.

Again he went slowly back over the past. It was as the

searching of a beast of prey over past hunting-grounds trying to discover where the pitfalls had been placed for him by man, his enemy.

"He kept me within reach, and yet away from him; and Symee— Ah, this is the hardest to bear. Symee, my sister, my sister!"

He could not bear the thought. He started up to his full height, and any one present would have been frightened to see the change in Jesse Vicary's face. He looked years older, a man now possessed of terrible power for evil as well as for good. He went to the window and threw it open, not noticing the chill, foggy evening air that swept in. He felt as if he were in a stifling place, and as if he would be suffocated with the burden of his wrath.

"And how near I was to accepting that offer," he thought again and again. "Then he would have got rid of me and Symee forever. That benevolent face might have gone on and cheated others as it has cheated me; but, at least, now I am free, free to carry out his punishment. I will register a vow—I do—that I will bring him to justice; not legal justice, there is none in this land. A rich man can boast of being unjust. Ah! he has kept himself well within the false legal palings; he has provided for us amply—nobly—" Here Jesse laughed aloud; but let no one wish to hear a man laugh at his enemy. There is something that speaks too plainly in it of a hideous spirit of evil. "No, I will bring him a punishment he will quail before far more than anything the law could do to him. Kestell of Greystone—that sounds well enough. I have often said it approvingly; but it may yet be humbled and brought to shame. For what? For doing what hundreds have done before him. No, that will bring no shame. The world will praise him for making me what I am—able to stand alone; able to be free of him and of every one else. There must be other punishments reserved by Heaven for such deeds. Mr. Kestell's generosity was bitter before; but now it is unbearable."

The room was too small for him. Seizing his hat, Jesse rushed away from his lodgings. Anywhere, out into the street; he wanted to get away from himself, from the Jesse who had honored this Kestell of Greystone, and had all his life striven to please him. He wanted to undo the past, and knew not how to set about it.

How long Jesse wandered about through squalid streets he never knew or remembered; but that he did come in at all that night was due to 'Liza. Jesse had so long been used to think of others that he involuntarily did so now. Poor sleepy 'Liza would have to sit up till he came in, for she was a very devoted maiden, and would never go to bed till Mr. Vicary had had his supper.

Little actions often bring about great results; and so it happened that Jesse Vicary went to bed that night because 'Liza sat up for him.

"Lor', Mr. Vicary, you be late. I most a-thought you had been run'd over," she said; "but there's the supper ready, and I've kept the kettle on the boil, and missus she said you'd never done such a thing in your life before as stay out so late."

Jesse smiled now, and, though it was rather cheerless, this smile had all the sweetness which lay at the bottom of this man's nature in it.

"No, no, 'Liza, I'm not 'run'd over;' not in your sense of the word, anyhow. Go off to bed at once. I am sorry I have kept you up so late."

"You're never a-goin' to sit up later, Mr. Vicary, are you? Them nasty books are no use at this time of night."

"No, you're right. Well, there, 'Liza, I'm going to bed," said Jesse, to get rid of 'Liza; and after that he had to keep his word.

He woke up in no better frame of mind, and once more the same fierce reasoning went on surging and revolving in his brain. He was now only anxious to get calm enough to think out a connected plan of action; but in the meantime he must go to his work as usual, and life must jog on in its customary dull routine, just as if he had not discovered the secret of his life, and as if everything in the world depended on the business transactions of the firm of Card & Lilley.

When he returned home he half thought he would go and begin the scheme he was slowly trying to evolve, by visiting Obed Diggings and having a talk with him. The thought even crossed Jesse's mind whether, if he took the inventor into a public-house and treated him freely, his memory would not be made clearer about the past; but he

at once rejected the idea as unworthy of himself, or of any man who respected his fellow-creatures.

However, as he thought he could speak more freely if Obed came to him, he wrote a note, telling Diggings to call that evening if he could, and if not, the next night. That poor girl of his should hear nothing of the sins of sinful humanity.

Then he sat down calmly to make a clear, defined, well-considered plan for bringing Mr. Kestell to justice—the justice of public opinion; the justice which would not allow an evil deed to be called benevolence, or cowardly silence philanthropy.

He would be quite calm, quite dispassionate, till all was ready for exposure. He, Jesse, had felt all the burden of private shame—shame of his own being. Let the author of it now feel it in some measure also, if he could, and let him experience what would touch him keenly—public disgrace.

He sat down, and fancied he was going to see the clear plan of his campaign evolve itself; but instead of this he still sat on almost stupidly; the high pressure of feeling of the day before had exhausted him; he knew not where to begin, or what to do? Where was his proof? How could he, Jesse Vicary, bring Mr. Kestell of Greystone to justice? He went over the short scene of the day before, gazing as he did so at the spot where Mr. Kestell had stood. Proof! what more was needed than that face, that ghastly hue, and that expression of guilt? Certainly nothing more was needed for him, Vicary; but for the world? Those words, "I can not tell," were no proof, none whatever; it was Jesse's duty patiently to labor till he had found one.

Jesse Vicary had neither the money nor the opportunity for this difficult and delicate bringing together of facts; he saw this well enough, but it made no difference to him.

"It may take me months, years, but I shall do it," he said. "I must be prudent and cautious; I must be my own counselor and my own lawyer, if every man's hand is against me. Let me trust to myself alone."

At this moment there was a knock at the door, and Jesse said, "Come in," without troubling himself to get up. 'Liza's advent was of little importance to him. Or, perhaps it was only Diggings. But he was startled by the

voice which had once attracted him so much, the voice of Hoel Fenner.

"Vicary! What, in a brown, a deep-brown study?"

Jesse started up, and held out his hand; but Hoel at once noticed the change in his face.

"Mr. Fenner, I did not expect you! I have heard nothing of you for a long time."

Hoel felt the implied reproach; for, once more in Jesse's presence, he experienced the same curious attraction which had first drawn him to this strange anomaly; this combination of power without wealth or prestige, and of strength without any much-advertised show of it. But this Jesse Vicary was changed from the Vicary he had first befriended. He seemed at once to see this, and Jesse took no trouble to hide it or to put on his old calm, hopeful manner.

"No; you disappeared like a meteor after your refusal, and I have been laid up ever since at Rushbrook. Now, however, I am coming back to work. May I sit down?" for Jesse had not even offered a chair to his visitor. "What's the matter, my dear fellow? Do you know I have not quite forgiven you for throwing us over as you did, after having made me believe that you were thirsting for literary work? Of course Mr. Kestell did give in, as I predicted, and then—well, then—"

"Yes, I refused," said Vicary. "Mr. Kestell did not really wish me to accept; but I did it out of my own free will, entirely."

"Yes, I thought as much. You are not easily led by others. I suppose I must not ask what were your reasons at the last moment. I was rather put to it to explain it to the chief; but of course a post like that does not go begging. I fear I shall not get the chance again of offering it to any one, and yet the fellow we have is not half so well fitted for the place as you would have been. He is sharp and clever, certainly; but he misses your—what shall I call it?—your more original view of men and things."

This praise—for it was no flattery—would, a few weeks ago, have made Jesse Vicary a proud and a happy man; but now he was quite impervious to praise or blame.

Hoel was so much surprised at this strange conduct that it recalled to him the curious exodus of Vicary from Rushbrook and the unexplained reason of the rejection of his

offer. Was it possible that Mr. Kestell knew, and had something to do with it?

Jesse himself was touched by the appearance of Mr. Fenner in the darkest hour of his trial. He almost wished he could confide in him, and yet how was it possible? Was not Mr. Fenner—Symee had told him—the accepted lover of Miss Elva? How could he, without proof, bring the charge against this man's future father-in-law? The irony of fate made him smile contemptuously. Should he or should he not say anything to Mr. Fenner? It was a difficult question to decide, and yet this man, clever, polished, and prosperous, was the only being who had held out something better than the hand of pity to Jesse, even if it had not quite been the right hand of fellowship.

The pause that followed Hoel's last words—and during which Jesse had wearily turned the question over—was broken by Hoel saying:

"Something has gone wrong. I won't worry you to-night; I only came to hunt you up in case you still wanted occasional work. Also I—I thought I should like you to know, Vicary—I dare say you do know already—that I am going to marry Miss Kestell in January. It seems curious that when I first knew you I never guessed at the connection you had with Rushbrook, nor how interested I myself should be in it soon."

"I do wish you joy, sir. My sister told me the news." Then fiercely Jesse added: "Mr. Kestell was here last evening."

"Was he? He telegraphed that important business had obliged him to come to town. I left this morning, so I did not see him again."

"Important business? Perhaps his offer to me was what he meant."

There was no disguising the bitterness of the tone, and Hoel knew at once that Vicary's strange state of mind was somehow connected with Mr. Kestell.

"His offer to you?"

"Yes, he wants to get me out of the country. He offers me a farm in Canada, but I have refused. Thank goodness, I am free of him and his offers forever."

Hoel had always before now heard Jesse speak in tones of deepest gratitude of his patron, so he was utterly surprised at this new development.

"But might not his offer be made in pure kindness, because of your refusal of our opening? Don't you think you have taken the thing as it was not meant to be taken? Come, Vicary, I think you are a little unreasonable."

Hoel spoke half seriously, half lightly, feeling at a loss to unravel Jesse's altered demeanor. Jesse did not answer for a few moments. He was trying to curb his emotion, trying to school himself to be calm, and not to disclose his secret to any one till the full truth should be discovered; but Hoel had attracted Jesse by that easy sympathy which no one else but he had given to the unknown clerk; and, in spite of his resolution, Jesse craved for sympathy as every noble soul does crave; for it is the man who has no sympathy to offer who most often rejects it when it is offered to him.

In spite of himself, as it seemed, Jesse once again appealed to Hoel.

"I don't know why you are good enough to take any interest in my affairs, Mr. Fenner; but as you do, I may as well partly explain why I am angry with Mr. Kestell, the man whom you have heard me speak of with so much gratitude. I am afraid of saying what I should not, considering that you will soon be one of the family."

"Why, it is just for that reason, Vicary, that you can speak out. Mr. Kestell does not guess, I am sure, that he has rubbed you up the wrong way, so to speak, and it will be my duty to set matters straight between you. Indeed, honestly, Vicary, I have never heard him speak but most kindly of you, and I know he has the highest opinion of you. There must be some little misunderstanding, which can easily be set right. One sometimes gets to brooding about imaginary wrongs. I can speak from personal experience. My own uncle once upset my—what shall I call it?—my pride, and that little rift is not yet mended. Indeed now it has become such a permanent barrier that it has ceased to annoy me at all. But I am not sure whether, if, long ago, some third person had intervened, matters might not have been different and happier for both of us."

Jesse settled, then and there, to speak the truth to Hoel, but not the whole truth now—that was impossible.

"You may be right, Mr. Fenner, but I—well, the question may make you smile, but it is of great importance to me. I want to find out the truth about my origin. I am

afraid there is nothing pleasant to find out, but Mr. Kestell knows it, and he refuses to tell me. Let it be bad—he acknowledged as much—but, anyhow, I am a man, and I must find it out. I have a right to know."

To himself Hoel said: "Poor fellow! It's a pity he has feelings on that score. I dare say it is bad, and Mr. Kestell wishes to spare him. I understand it perfectly."

"What purpose would be served by a statement of plain and perhaps unpalatable facts?" he said, aloud.

"Possibly none; but I wish to know the worst. What I am sure of, is this. My mother and grandmother lodged for a short time in a cottage, near the brow of Rushbrook Beacon. I got this from an old Mrs. Joyce, who was their neighbor at the time and knew them. My mother was young and pretty; Mrs. Joyce called her Mrs. Vicary, and yet believes her to have been own daughter to the old woman of the same name. You understand, Mr. Fenner. If Mr. Kestell knows it, have I not the right to ask for the name of my father? My mother died soon after the birth of her twins, the old woman shortly after. With them, it might seem, died the secret. They talked, certainly, of a husband abroad, and of his death; anyhow, he never appeared; he never came forward, and, alas, in these cases it is not often that the truth is told. Did he die, or was he abroad? It may be a foolish wish; but, anyhow, forgive me if I speak strongly, I am determined to find out the name of my father, even if he refuses to let me legally call myself his son."

Jesse spoke in a low, suppressed voice, he hardly dared trust himself to stop till all was said. To Hoel this speech did seem to make a mountain out of a mole-hill; still he was ready to offer his help.

"Very well, Vicary, I am ready to help you; I see it is useless to say 'let it alone.' Besides, there can be no very great difficulty. Without Mr. Kestell's help I can find out all there is to know. I feel sure his silence is merely a wish to spare you some sad, but common story of desertion. Look upon me as a friend, and give me a week to find it out in. Do nothing yourself during that time, and I will bring you the answer."

Jesse paused and considered, then he said gratefully:

"Thank you. For a week I will do nothing."

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNSIGNED WILL.

HOEL had undertaken a task without counting the cost; and when he was indulging in his evening pipe, he saw that he had done rather a foolish thing. In the first place, Mr. Kestell had, of course, some excellent reason for withholding the truth; and not even for a moment did Hoel doubt that his future father-in-law's reason was good. The idea that had taken possession of Jesse, did not even enter his bairn. Still, he could not help puzzling a little why there should be any mystery about what was, most likely, a very ordinary case.

"I should say," meditated Hoel, "that the father was some friend of Kestell, and that, in the capacity of lawyer, he looked after these luckless twins. Most likely, he was given a sum of money for the purpose, and was bound down to secrecy. Of course that is it; it is as plain as a sign-post. It is far better for Vicary to accept his position, such as he can make it; and if he were not a little wrong-headed, he could have made it a splendid one. It seems to me I have undertaken a foolish task. Mr. Kestell, being a man of honor, is bound by a promise. Still, I am not; and, of course, were he not bound, he would have no earthly objection to telling Vicary everything he cared to know. Vicary takes the consequence on his own head. It is, after all, a simple matter, and, were I a lawyer, I should soon unearth the secret. Well, it might be unpleasant for Mr. Kestell if he thought he had to refuse me, if I asked him the question point-blank; or, if he told me, he might also bind me to secrecy. I think I'll work on my own lines. I'll run down to Greystone, and from there I can go to the village and hunt up a few facts. The two women came from somewhere, I conclude, and did not drop from the clouds. Registers of births, deaths, and marriages tell their tale pretty plainly; and, in these out-of-the-way places, tradition is strong. The only awkward part is appearing to spy out the land unbeknown to my future father-in-law, who, by the way, must possess somewhat of a suspicious, secretive disposition, though he hides it well in ordinary life."

Hoel resolved to go to Greystone the next day; but the morning post brought him two letters which changed his mind. The one he first opened was from Elva. Such a happy letter, full of trust in Hoel and very unconcealed admiration. The little cloud had blown over; she was only ready to take his word and his opinion in everything. She made a beautiful picture of him in a mirror of her own, and then described to her lover what she saw. The originality of her views peeped out in delightful little sentences, the merit of which Hoel was well able to appreciate. He was even slightly glad that he was aware of this, and that Elva was ignorant of her own merits. In his matured mind, a woman lost much of her charm of cleverness when she became conscious of possessing it. And just now, Elva was conscious of nothing but of her great love for Hoel. It was best so; by and by, Hoel could himself watch over any dawning feeling of separate identity, and, if necessary, he could smother it at its birth. A wife must have but one view; her horizon must be bounded by a lower line than that at which her husband gazes. Anyhow, it must never be placed further.

He read the last page twice over, and was satisfied, and we know Hoel was not easily contented with mediocrity.

"DEAR HOEL,—When you were really gone I began to realize my loss, even though it is for such a short time. I think there must be some natures who are created imperfect, so that their happiness may be given to them in the shape of a complementary human being, without whom they can not recognize their own natures. I have had a happy life, you know, and yet it is only now that I have suddenly discovered I was not really living before. I wanted you to teach me myself. You will understand this, although I can not explain it. Words seem such poor things to give to those we love; we want to give our fresh-created thoughts in all their perfection and imperfection. I have often tried to make Nature understand what I mean when I lie down on a bank of heather in summer, or sit by one of the Pools; but now I see how far, far above Nature is one human soul. The trees and the wind, everything we see, are all so intensely above us and below us; above us in their irritating calmness, and below us in their want of sympathy with suffering and joy. There, I must not go

on writing like this; you will think me childish. But I feel so happy, my own dear Hoel, that I must say so even at the risk of you answering that I am foolish. You will teach me wisdom, won't you? I blame myself for being too much absorbed in our happiness. Books say this is natural, and yet I don't want to be just like everybody else.

"Since you left I see that papa is really unwell. I made him call in the doctor again. He suffers so much from sleeplessness. Doctor Pink says that is the cry of our modern men of business. I believe he does not like my going away; and yet I can not feel sorry to leave everybody as much as I ought to do. I don't believe any girl ever had a better father than mine. Such love and tenderness must be rare. If it were not that I know his whole heart and mind is wrapped up in mamma, I don't think I could leave him, even for you, Hoel. There, what do you say to that? I am going to devote myself to my own family, sir, for these last few weeks, so do not expect much from me. Amice and I are going to take a secret expedition to London this week—toward the end of it—and we do not want to see any one above the rank of a shopman, so I shall not even tell you the day. It will do Amice good to see the wicked world. Your loving

"ELVA KESTELL."

Hoel heaved a little sigh of utter contentment as he opened his second letter, which was from his uncle, and was short, if decided.

"DEAR HOEL,—Come down at once to see me; I want to talk over your settlements with you. I don't think Mr. Kestell is doing enough for his daughter, considering that I hear his fortune is considerable, and he may live for years. Hunter will draw up the settlements; and I assure you he is a very sharp fellow.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"MELLISH FENNER."

For a moment Hoel thought he would disobey the command. He had made up his mind to go to Greystone after Jesse's business, and he had a good deal of work in town; but second thoughts made him decide to give in to his un-

cle. It is easy to be magnanimous when one is in a blissful state of mind. He telegraphed that he would run down for the night; and then wrote a very hasty but lover-like letter to Elva.

That same evening Hoel was sitting by his uncle's invalid-chair.

Mellish Fenner was not by any means a man who inspired love; he had a fretful restlessness of manner, coupled with a slightly cynical way of expressing his opinion, which grated on Hoel's susceptibilities. The uncle was disappointed that his nephew had done very well without him, and yet even now he could not bring himself to treat him as his son; he had no fault to find with him, but he secretly guessed that Hoel was not now capable of much gratitude. Long ago this would have been different. There are many who can do nothing but curse their own short-sighted folly, and this occupation can not be enlivening. It had not improved the natural asperity of the elder man.

Hoel had come down prepared to uphold all Mr. Kestell's doings and arrangements. Mr. Mellish Fenner, on the contrary, was specially carping and contentious over the proposed settlements; but Hoel had determined to keep his temper, and he kept it. His uncle was further irritated by this perfect cheerfulness, out of which no dispute could be extracted. But at last Mellish Fenner spoke out:

"You insist on accepting no advice, Hoel. I suppose all young men, nowadays, think they know better than their elders. You resemble the Pellews much more than any Fenner I ever knew, and the result with you will be the same as it was with most of them. Their obstinacy led them into every possible misfortune, and two or three went utterly to the dogs."

Hoel smiled good-naturedly, the sins and iniquities of these cousins once or twice removed touched him but little; but suddenly, however, he remembered Amice Kestell's question: "Who was John Pellew?"

"By the way, sir, talking of the Pellews, I find Mr. Kestell knew something of them. He mentioned them the other evening. Can you tell me anything about a John Pellew? Not the present man, of course, but a John Pellew of a former generation."

"He was one of those who went to the dogs. He was

the youngest son, and was, naturally, a fine fellow; but his obstinacy was boundless."

"And what did it do for him?"

"Oh, I knew nothing of him, he was my junior; but I saw him once when he came back from India, years ago. He had gone there in opposition to his family, and was secretary to some official, I believe. The last time he came home they wished to marry him very suitably; but he utterly refused, went back to India, and died soon after. And yet he was a very promising young fellow, and might have been anything he chose."

"There was, surely, another John Pellew?"

"Oh, yes, but quite another sort of man; he made a great deal of money, and left one son, the present Godfrey. You don't know him."

"The other never married?"

"No; utterly refused a pretty wife and four thousand a year. His father never forgave him, and washed his hands of him after that."

"You see, I have not quite followed in his footsteps," smiled Hoel.

"Yes, you have, only in another way; here is a man as rich as Crœsus, who offers you a miserable pittance with his daughter. In these days, a wife is not kept on nothing in London. Besides—"

"Elva is not extravagant."

"I shall write to Mr. Kestell."

Hoel was irritated, but kept his temper.

"Then, pray write as my guardian, sir, not as my uncle."

Mellish looked up at his nephew, he half put out his hand, and the words, "As your father," were on the tip of his lips; but a bit of mechanism, long unoiled, refuses to work at a moment's notice, and the words were not said.

"Very well. Now, my dear Hoel, I am tired; shall I see you in the morning?"

"I am afraid not. I must take the first train. Thank you, sir, for the interest you take in my affairs; but, indeed, I am anxious to spare you all trouble."

"Yes, yes, Hoel, I believe you; but— Well, remember I shall certainly write to Mr. Kestell."

When the door shut behind Hoel, Mellish Fenner wheeled

himself to his writing-table and took out his will from a private drawer. It was all made out in very legal language, and it left everything he possessed to his nephew, Hoel Fenner; but at present it was waste paper, for it was not signed.

"I shall send for Hunter to-morrow," he said, half aloud, "and I shall sign this; I intended it all along; but there was no hurry about the matter, no hurry whatever. I wish I had told Hoel to-night; but the boy is provokingly independent. I shouldn't like him to be cringing; but really—ah, well, I'll send for Hunter to-morrow, and write to Hoel in the evening."

Mellish Fenner put away his unsigned will and rang the bell for his servant. His bedroom was on the ground floor, Hoel's was upstairs; if this had not been the case, the invalid would have gone in and told Hoel at once; but the extra trouble of sending again for his nephew prevented him. "There's time enough to-morrow," he thought. "I'll tear up that old will, when I sign this one," he thought. "Of course I have no intention of leaving my money to Arthur Fenner, who is already rich; I thought of that when Hoel's father was so aggravatingly foolish, but I never meant it after I adopted Hoel. He has never given me any trouble, never."

The next morning Hoel was called an hour earlier than he had ordered.

"Master Hoel," said the old man-servant, looking pale and horrified as Hoel opened his eyes, "master is ill—we have sent for the doctor; but—"

Hoel started up.

"Well?"

"Oh, sir, the master's dead. It is his heart."

Before evening, Hoel knew that his uncle had not signed his will, and that he had not left him a penny.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE GREYSTONE HOTEL.

It was a new outlook for him, and Hoel was not quite prepared to face it. He had lived on a high level of expecting nothing from his uncle, and had acted on these honorable and independent ideas; but in the background

of his mind Hoel had fully expected that Mellish Fenner would leave him his fortune when he died. Hoel had judged rightly, and knew he had when the new will was discovered unsigned.

He recognized now that he would have to live upon his own income in the future without the delightful salve of showing his uncle that he could do without him, and, as we have said, the idea was not pleasant. True, he was on the eve of marrying a rich wife, but this was the very feeling which had previously galled him, and which had only been softened by the moral certainty of his uncle's intentions. One moment, and all this had ended.

Hoel behaved with conventional propriety; he determined to betray no sign of resentment or surprise. The family lawyer, Mr. Hunter, came and promised to undertake all the necessary business. Without a word Hoel handed him the unsigned will, which he had discovered in his uncle's drawer.

"He meant this one," said the lawyer, much annoyed, "he really did, Mr. Fenner. It was only last week that he told me he should want me about his new will."

Hoel smiled. What a lie can be hidden in a smile!

"Only he put it off. But you know, Mr. Hunter, I never expected anything from my uncle."

"You have always been exemplary," said the lawyer, distressed beyond measure. "But your cousin will certainly not accept the—mistake."

"Why not? It was a chance. Pray think nothing of it. I should certainly not accept a gift from a distant relation. Thank you for your trouble, Mr. Hunter, I am quite unable at this moment to leave town, so you will kindly do all that is necessary. I shall come to the funeral."

Mr. Hunter was not taken in; his only consolation was that Hoel had a good prospect of being a rich man in spite of his uncle's mistake. Still, it was the look of the thing which made the lawyer angry. It was just like Mr. Fenner to put off doing what was right because of some stupid reasoning. What would the world say?

In the meanwhile, Hoel returned to London, and wrote to Elva, saying that his uncle's sudden death need not postpone their wedding. It would only be necessary to have a

very quiet affair; and that they would both prefer. He said nothing about money.

"That will be known on the day of the funeral," thought Hoel, "and by that time I shall have become quite reconciled to the inevitable, and ready to smile at what the world thinks."

There are some events which make a deep dent in the character, even when that character is formed. Hoel felt that this was now the case with him. He was pulled up short, and was forced to look back at his own conduct. He had so much prided himself on his dealings with Mellish Fenner; they had been so irreproachable, and yet—was this result altogether his uncle's fault? If he had conducted himself less as an equal with the old man, and had given him more patient affection, even with the same result, the position would not be so irritating as it now was.

Very dimly Hoel began to realize that his own life had been all along a beautiful sham, an idol set up for his own worship, a galvanized lay figure. He put away the idea from his mind again and again, and yet back it came, as if worked by a self-acting spring. He was, he always had been, a sham, and there was every probability that he would be one to the end of his life.

For how could a man of his age alter? No, the idea was ridiculous. Better brave it all out on the old system, better be the gentlemanly, the clever, the agreeable, the irreproachable Hoel Fenner to the end of the chapter, than begin again at the beginning.

Worse thought, was it this sham that Elva was setting up also to worship? Was he trying to persuade her that his hollow perfection was a satisfying ideal for a woman whose charm was intense reality? Why not, if she were satisfied, why trouble her ideal?

Hoel spent a bad hour over all these gloomy ideas, and at the end of it he threw away a cigar which seemed tainted with sham, and recollected that three days had gone by, and that Jesse Vicary's week was passing away.

Action is the only relief to some dismal thoughts, and Hoel determined to run down to Greystone the next morning. To make this possible he had a few matters to see after; and hoping the effort would be once for all, he thrust away his gloomy subject of meditation, and re-

turned to the ordinary habitation of the natural man—Hoel.

His programme was simple, and he believed would be quite efficacious. Most likely Elva would not be at home, so there would be little likelihood of meeting her. He would keep his visit a secret, or invent an excuse if he were found out, about some arrangements as to farms or other business, which convenient word, as we know, covers a multitude of extraneous matter when used by a man to a woman. The thought of Jesse Vicary seemed to be especially acceptable to Hoel just now. It represented a simple figure, and no complex sham about it, and yet a man who could err, as he certainly was doing, in this matter of Mr. Kestell. The whole business was foolish, and the sooner it was set straight the better. To a man whose ideal of self has just been slightly shaken, it is a great panacea to pose as a reformer or a mediator. That is a character which every one admires, and which no one need mind claiming. It fills the abased soul with new oil of gladness, and helps to restore the fallen idol.

The Greystone Hotel was dull and respectable; and Hoel, smiling at the strange circumstance which made him put up here, instead of being a guest at the luxurious house of Mr. Kestell, deposited his modest portmanteau, ordered a late dinner, and then started out for his delicious walk across the heather lands. Though colder than it had been, the sun was shining brightly. All Nature was rejoicing in her own beauty, so that Hoel was carried back to the day when he had first seen Elva on her native heath.

There was a haze over the forest land when, at last, he reached the solitary cottage at the foot of the Beacon. Before entering he paused and looked around. The shadow and the sunlight were alike softened by the thin veil of mist. A distant song of a bird was heard, then the soughing of the wind among the trees near at hand, waving the yellow, large-fronded bracken at their base.

Below him he could discern the clear pool, partly blue and partly shadowed; turning his head a little, he could see the bank where Elva had sat unconscious of his admiring gaze. He looked toward the trees of Rushbrook, and wondered whether he should not be forced to run down and see Elva just for a minute. On the other hand, she

might not be there, and he might only find Mr. Kestell or Amice. That would be too disappointing. Ah, by the way, he must write to Amice about John Pellew. In the shock of that sudden death he had forgotten her anxiety to know about John Pellew.

Hoel pulled himself together and dismissed these attractive thoughts. He had come to do a service to Vicary. He must make haste and get it over, so as to return to town early next morning.

So, walking up to the cottage, he knocked at the door, and entered, just as Jesse himself had done some weeks before.

The knock was answered by the old woman's "Come in." She was quite alone. Her daughter and the children were all out, and she was knitting contentedly. Hoel had prepared his introduction, and was ready with it.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Joyce. Don't disturb yourself. I am Mr. Fenner, a friend of Jesse Vicary; and he told me you were glad to hear about your grandchild from any one who knew him."

"Thank you, sir. Come in and take a chair. I'm that crippled with rheumatism that I can't move much. Well, yes; we be glad to hear of 'Liza. She's a good girl, is 'Liza, and Mr. Vicary is mighty kind to our girl. There's not many young men like he, sir."

After this it was not difficult to launch into the subject of Jesse, and gradually to lead it round to the time when old Mrs. Joyce was wondering about the pretty young woman who was lodging in the cottage below, with her mother.

"You never saw the father?" asked Hoel.

"No, sir; and to tell you the truth, sir, I think the poor young thing never had a lawful husband. When a wife is a wife, why, there's nothing as will stop her talking about her husband; but both mother and daughter were mighty close on that subject. He was abroad, and always coming back; but never did he come. And when it was convenient, then the mother said he was dead. I mind the day the twins were born, sir, and how old Mrs. Vicary took on so till Mr. Kestell come up to her."

"Poor things! The mother was pretty, you say?"

"Pretty! Lor', sir, she was a pretty gal. Mr. Vicary don't favor her at all; no more does the sister; though

when I see her I can fancy I'm looking at a bad likeness of the mother. She was too pretty, sir, for a poor girl. It's the ruin of them often, when their looks is merely useful for show. I'm not the one to throw stones; but I'm sure that poor thing was never a wife, as the church made, albeit her mother stuck by her so, as a mother should do, seeing if she had brought up her girl better these misfortunes wouldn't happen."

Hoel could get no more information, except as to the name of the village, the other side of the high table-land of forest which bounded the horizon.

"They came from Crowcutt, so I understood; but, as I said, they were very close—both mother and daughter."

Hoel turned the conversation, so as to avert all suspicion from Mrs. Joyce's mind, and after some more ordinary talk he took his leave.

Crowcutt was a good walk, but he had time, and he would enjoy the tramp across the moorland. The only difficulty was, that he must pass close by Rushbrook, and take the path by the Home Farm; however, he hoped fortune would favor him, and that he would meet no one.

Jesse's story now and then came uppermost in his mind; it seemed to open out once more the problems of life which Hoel had been accustomed to accept as inevitable. His well-regulated mind—for thus he styled it to himself—had made no illusions on the subject, he had neither soared to the height of believing in moral perfection on earth, nor had he sunk to a platform where such subjects are treated as merely questions of self-interest; no, Hoel had kept to that happy mean which may perhaps be more fatal to the improvement of a character than the lowest depth. Some catastrophe may startle the reprobate into improvement; but what can rouse the self-satisfied?

At present, Hoel had nothing of the spirit which once made a man exclaim: "I should die with hunger were I at peace with the world." In this sense, Hoel was never hungry, and, till now, he had had a cordial understanding with the world! He had thought out problems as often as do most clever men, and on every question he had brought his learning, his acute perception, his more than ordinary acumen to bear; but one thing Hoel had never given to abstract question, nay, had never given to any one or anything—his soul. Philosophers will laugh at this visionary

word, men of science will ask us where the soul resides; but every one who has the power of giving that which we call his soul to a subject, will understand, without any definition, what that state is which makes some men take hold of a subject—not as one takes up a piece of delicate china—but with all the loving force and energy that one holds what is one's most precious possession.

Now, at last, Hoel reached one of the great landmark clumps before mentioned. It was not the same which he had climbed with Elva, but at some distance from that; from here he could look down on Crowcutt, which might be about two miles off. Here was the object of his journey, and, at present there seemed quite a comforting end; he was doing something for somebody besides himself, something for the one man who had first roused him to a belief in an invisible power apart from character. In trying to find out all he could about his parentage, he would help to calm down this man's misguided anger, he would perhaps get new ideas about social subjects, such as the far-stretching obligations of responsibility; he might even get some clew about the father who had cared so little for Jesse, a son who had now begun to wage war against his own name and origin. He might—but with a strange smile at himself and his new mission, Hoel Fenner pulled himself together and said aloud:

"Dreaming is certainly not my object for coming here. I want bare facts, not fiction; by to-morrow I shall be able to satisfy Jesse Vicary that life must be accepted in the shape which the gods give us. It must be the sign of a weak nature to fret over the inevitable; but Vicary will soon see reason, even the soundest oak will warp before it is properly seasoned, and the noble fellow has to learn this."

Then Hoel walked rapidly down to Crowcutt.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOEL KNOWS ALL.

Amice Kestell had been waiting patiently for guidance; she had become more silent, more shy and frightened in the presence of her parents; even with Elva she now and then seemed to have lost her old trust. She was like a person who is always listening for the arrival of some one.

Had Elva been less busy, and less taken up with her own affairs, she would have been more keenly alive to her sister's strange looks and conduct. As it was, she only made happy plans for the future; Amice should often stay in London with her, and she would be brought forward, and lose her shyness in the pleasure of having her musical talents appreciated.

Just now Amice's spirituality somewhat jarred on Elva; she could not feel much response herself, and the glimpses of a possible life of sacrifice faded away. This was natural, considering Hoel filled up all her heart and her mind.

It so happened that Elva's approaching wedding had much excited her cousins, the Fitzgeralds, and that a pressing invitation to come to town had arrived on the same day that Elva had written to Hoel. Mrs. Kestell was so anxious that her daughter should accept, that Elva reluctantly agreed to go and spend two nights in London, and get through her shopping with her cousins' help, instead of going up with Amice for the day. It was impossible for them both to leave home together, for Mrs. Kestell could not bear the idea of being without one daughter; and Elva, knowing how busy she should be, and that most likely Hoel would be seeing after his uncle's affairs, determined not to tell him. Besides, the Fitzgeralds were so very foolish and so fast that Hoel would not like them; he was so particular about women, and his creed about them included a clause against flirting.

Amice seemed almost glad to be alone; she had to put such a strain upon herself in order to appear at all cheerful, that she looked forward to two days of intense quiet. She determined that she would somehow manage not to be alone with her father, for it was this she so much dreaded.

Almost unconsciously, when she had done her usual cottage-visiting, she turned her steps toward the Home Farm. The silence of the woods was so calming, and here she could think out her plan about Symee. Whenever she passed the spot where she had found Jesse that memorable evening, the whole scene came back painfully to her. Some minds can recall so vividly, that it almost seems to them as if they saw with their worldly eyes the scenes they imagine.

To-day, as Amice passed the spot, she stopped involuntarily; she fancied she saw Jesse sitting there, plunged in

despair; she fancied that once more she beheld the dejected figure, the look of misery on the strong features, the . . .

Amice had an inward shudder; she pressed her hand over her eyes. Was the curse coming upon her again, that past scenes forced themselves on her as new realities, for surely in the same spot, in the same attitude, Jesse was there!

Her heart seemed to stop beating, wild fancies rushed through her brain that Jesse had appeared to her again to claim her help against something—or somebody, that she had waited too long, and that Herbert Heaton had not yet been to London.

She seemed rooted to the spot, not daring to approach nearer to that figure, for fear it should vanish into thin air, and thus confirm her belief that it was a spirit come to reproach her; but Amice was brave. In another moment she resolved to go forward, and just as the quiet evening breeze swept through the tall firs and shook the dead, crisp branches, she took a step forward and murmured, "Mr. Vicary."

The figure started up. It was no ghost; yet it was not Jesse that suddenly turned toward her, but Hoel Fenner!

Amice was not prepared for Hoel's appearance in this spot. But this fact did not startle her. She knew Elva had not told him she was in London, so his presence could not concern her sister; but what did startle her now was the expression of Hoel's face. To her poor, overwrought brain it seemed to be merely a repetition of Jesse Vicary's look, only worse, for Jesse's usual expression was somewhat grave and severe, while Hoel's had been always placid and calm. For three or four seconds the two stood there speechless and almost motionless; only once again Amice passed her hand over her brow, and her large blue eyes looked bewildered.

It was Hoel who first broke the silence; but his voice seemed changed. Could it be the same man who had laughed so happily, and talked so amusingly, only a few weeks ago?

"Miss Kestell, I have frightened you," he said. "Don't look so startled. I was a little surprised at seeing you here, just because I was thinking of you—wanting you."

"Me!" said Amice, leaning against a fir-trunk in order to recover herself, and find strength to be quite natural.

"Yes, you; I wished for you intensely, and you came. We sometimes are frightened when our wishes are realized in this way."

"You want to see Elva," said Amice, taking no notice of his words. "I am sorry she is in London for two days. She is with the Fitzgeralds, our cousins. She will be so disappointed to know you came when she was away. She fancied you were busy with your uncle's affairs."

"I am glad she is away," said Hoel, still in an altered voice. "Do not tell her I have been here; do not mention our meeting. It was you I wanted to see—you alone. It is getting chilly; will you walk toward the farm, or where can we go?"

Amice looked slowly up into Hoel's face with the thought that he must have gone mad; and a cold feeling came at her heart as she said to herself: "Is Elva to suffer, too? Will it reach her, my own noble-hearted sister, who has never had my feelings? No, not her, let me suffer doubly for her."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Fenner," she said, aloud, and with as much dignity as she could muster. "Why do you talk so strangely? What have we got to do with each other? Let me go by. I prefer walking home alone. I should not have disturbed you just now, but I fancied you were some one else."

"Some one else! Who, then?"

Amice did not answer. What made Mr. Fenner so strange in his manner?

"I beg your pardon," continued Hoel. "I hardly know what I am saying. Forgive me, I have annoyed you; think no more about it. Do you remember, Miss Amice, that you once asked me a question? Before my uncle died, I asked him who was—"

Amice suddenly seemed to wake up, the frigid expression she had put on gave place to a look of intense horror, her face became deathly pale, so that even Hoel, who was more anxious about his own thoughts than hers, noticed it.

She put her hand on his arm as a suppliant might do, and her tone was intensely humble.

"Yes, yes, I know. I asked you who was—John Pellew. Tell me, quickly, and then please leave me. I want to go on to the farm."

"Tell me first why you want to know."

"No, no, I can not."

"Has he anything to do with you; with your family? Tell me. It is very important to me."

"To you? Then you know?"

Amice's hands sunk listlessly by her side, and then she clasped them in order to get some support.

"Know what?" said Hoel, fiercely.

"You know. Yes, I can see it in your face. You know about the curse. Oh, Elva, Elva!"

"What do you mean?" said Hoel, in low, indignant, almost passionate tones. "Can you speak plainly, openly, and not with this mystery? I know. Yes, yes, I know; or, I will know. Speak plainly. I insist upon it."

Amice was again frightened. What had she said? Did he, or did he not know that strange mystery that haunted her life? If he did not know, what had she said?

She shook her head.

"Tell me what your uncle said."

"John Pellew was a distant cousin of mine. He was not thought very highly of, and he died young in India."

Hoel said this in a studied, cold manner, and waited, looking intensely at Amice as he did so. On her side, she seemed to take in the simple words with difficulty.

"Is that all?" she said, at last.

"What more will you have?"

"I don't know. He died young in India?"

"Yes."

"Did he—did your uncle know if he was poor?"

"The youngest of three is not likely to have been rich; but I will find out the rest."

"No," said Amice, quickly. "No, please, Mr. Fenner, don't find out any more. Leave it alone; leave it to me, for Elva's sake, if you love her."

"Hush; don't mention her, please. You asked me to leave you. Good-bye; I am going. I shall find out the rest; before long I shall know."

He unfolded his arms and picked up his stick, which had fallen on the needle-covered earth.

Amice never uttered another word. She watched Hoel striding away up the path, and, in a terror of uncertainty, she followed slowly behind.

"What does it all mean, and what has papa to do with

John Pellew? He died poor; then, surely—but he will find out. He knows, I feel sure; he knows something."

Hoel Fenner walked on as if the Furies were behind him. He had many miles to get over before he could reach Greystone, and his shortest way would have been by the Pools; but taking that path he would have to pass Rushbrook, and this he would not do, so, leaving the wood, he struck across country till he reached the high-road leading to the town.

He was late for his dinner, but scarcely minded that, and was not overpleased when the landlord insisted on talking to him.

"I think, sir, since I've seen your name on your luggage, you must be the gentleman who was in our railway accident? I hope, sir, you've recovered?"

"Yes, quite."

"There's only one poor man that's never got away from here, and they do say his days are numbered. He's at the little public close by. Mr. Kestell of Greystone, sir, has been kindness itself to the man."

"Yes, I remember—Button. I should like to see him. I—" Hoel paused. "I will go and see him after dinner, and I shall be returning to town to-morrow morning."

Hoel eat his dinner mechanically, he did not even know what he was eating; he never gave a thought to his weariness; there was time enough for that by and by.

When he entered the small room where Button lay in bed, he was struck by the look of death on the man's face. Drink had hastened on the end. Had he not been able to get the curse of his life, Joe Button might have pulled through. Strong and hale, he had not resisted his craving; and in his weakness, and with the ample means provided by Mr. Kestell, how was he to deny himself?

At first Button took Hoel for Mr. Kestell, then shaking off his lethargy, he roused himself.

"Ah, sir, so we were in the same accident. It's done for me. And yet I might have been in a better position. If I do get over this cursed illness, I'll go and claim my papers. Mr. Kestell has got them. They're no good to me; but yet I like to show people I might have been as rich as Kestell of Greystone. It's the rich that get all the good things. Yes, sir, we owned Westacre Lands—the

place where the mines were found—the mines that have made Mr. Kestell so rich. We ought to have held on longer."

"You sold them to him," said Hoel, indifferently.

"No, sir, not to him, but to another—a young gentleman; it's in the deeds—Mr. John Pellew."

"John Pellew!" gasped Hoel. 'What became of him? Speak out, man."

Button looked surprised.

"Did you happen to know him, sir? They say he died, and sold his right to Mr. Kestell. If he had lived he would have took on as much as I've done, I dare say; but there, he died, and it was Mr. Kestell who had it all. Money goes to money."

"Who said he sold his land to Mr. Kestell?" said Hoel, stooping down toward Button, who was getting thick in his speech.

"Who said it? Who said it? Why—he did, he did—Mr. Kestell. I don't blame him more than others, sir. Mr. Kestell's been liberal, he let me work on there some time; but it was—"

"I remember; the drink, man. You ruined yourself."

"If you don't mind, sir, just giving me a trifle—lending me, I mean—when Mr. Kestell comes again I'll return it. I haven't a sixpence to bless myself with. It's hard on a man who might have been rich."

"Pshaw, man! A trifle! God forbid I should give you even sixpence. Look here, I am going to Westacre Lands to-morrow, and I shall inquire into your story. Take my advice, give up the drink, and even now you may pull through. Good-night."

CHAPTER XV.

MISTAKEN SILENCE.

Jesse Vicary had managed to find a stock of patience—if patience was the word to apply to his state of mind. In a week he would know Mr. Fenner's version of the story; and then, forming his own conclusions, he would act for himself. Jesse was, during this time, in a curious mental condition; a hard crust seemed to be forming over his natural goodness. He walked more firmly, and felt an unusual antagonism to his kind. He could have expressed

his state of mind in the words, that his hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him. Pride seems but a poor comfort to an aching heart; the salve it gives is like veneer to rotten wood—it can not make whole, it can only deceive casual glances.

His poor neighbors saw but little of him at this time. He could not feel any pity for them; their lot, miserable as it was, appeared less false than his. They were, most of them, either contented with their surroundings, or else debasing themselves with their eyes open. Why should either of these two classes deserve pity when he who had striven so hard to rise all his life was to be crushed by a man who should at best offer him protection?

Jesse turned from human beings and opened his books. The dead offered more consolation than the living. Their truth, their falsehood, could be proved; or, if not proved —well, then doubted without stint. So Jesse spent all his spare hours, and some which had better have been spent in sleep, in poring over old musty volumes. Some of his favorite Latin authors were brought out again; but with them came the remembrance of his old master, so he preferred his mathematics. They took all his brains and left him no more room for thought.

So the week dragged wearily along, and every now and then Jesse tried, very ineffectively, to make out his plan of revenge. Some say revenge is sweet; but the planning is surely harassing work. Will it fail or will it succeed? A plan of revenge that may fail is by no means sweet; and much was against Jesse's grand idea of succeeding.

The world might call him mad, and demand proofs, or even might refuse to believe the proofs he meant to bring. The world is usually inclined to side with the rich and powerful, for it is altogether easier and safer in the long run; and Jesse recognized this, and it made him still more bitter.

It was at this time that he mentally asked the great question, "Why?" and would not let the answer reach his heart. It is by no means all questioners who wish to receive answers; they prefer knocking to listening for the permission to enter. The knocking provides the excuse for impatience and the self-pity.

Any other trial might not have found Jesse wanting. He could have mastered poverty, neglect, ill success; but

shame—no, this seemed to raise all his bad feelings, though the change was not visible to the outer world.

Till a man has been tried in his weakest point, let him not cast a stone at one who has reached the decisive turn in his life's journey. As to visions of beauty and goodness, they had faded entirely from Jesse's vision. He worked, read, slept, eat, came in and went out with clock-like regularity; but otherwise he was not himself, and, worst of all punishments, he knew it. Revenge—it was coming slowly, but surely; and it was this giant image he watched so keenly. He liked to see it become more shapely, more defined; he liked to see it advance one step daily nearer to him. It was his Juggernaut, and he was but waiting to throw himself before it in adoration.

But all this time not a word had he heard from Mr. Fenner. Still he trusted him. Belief in his friends died hard with Jesse; he judged others by himself. So intense were his affections that he could make grand allowances till his faith was shattered; then Jesse was apt to exaggerate the fault.

At last the day dawned. It was Saturday, and he should be home early from work. It was a bright, sunny day, even in London, after the mist and fog had cleared off. Even Golden Sparrow Street could not shut out the sky; indeed, the houses, being low and mean, allowed a greater expanse to be seen. On any other day Jesse might have taken a long trudge, but to-day he dared not go far. What time would Mr. Fenner come? Not before the evening; or, yes, knowing Jesse would be at home, he might look in earlier.

'Liza, when she triumphantly brought up the tea things, found Mr. Vicary walking up and down like a caged animal, and for once in her life she dared not address him a word.

"'Liza," said Jesse, suddenly, "if Mr. Fenner calls, show him upstairs at once. Don't imagine I am out, because I shall stay in till he comes."

And then he sat down to his solitary meal, while to aggravate his feelings still more, thoughts of Symee filled his mind, and would not be driven out.

Symee preferred comfort and plenty with servitude to liberty and a crust. Symee deserved her fate. She was a

woman, weak, easily led, afraid to do right or wrong. Well, she had chosen, it was not he, Jesse, who should now expatriate himself in order to have to bear with a weak girl's reproaches. She had had her choice, let her abide by it.

Six o'clock, seven o'clock, and no Hoel Fenner. He would not come now till late. The dinner-hour of the rich was a feast which could not be moved. What if he, too, were going to fail him, and he would not appear at all? What—Jesse was beginning to lose faith even in Hoel Fenner, when he heard footsteps on the stairs. Was knowledge near at hand? was revenge coming? was Mr. Fenner going to treat the matter lightly again?

The door opened, and Hoel Fenner entered.

The lamp shed its light only on a part of the room. It did not at once disclose Hoel's face plainly; unlike his usual habit, it was Jesse who spoke first, and as he held out his hand, all his natural diffidence seemed to have forsaken him.

"You are come, Mr. Fenner. I was beginning to think you had forgotten me and my very unimportant affairs; besides, this must be about your dinner-hour. Shut the door, 'Liza, and let no one else come up. Will you sit by the fire? It is chilly now in the evening."

"Thank you," said Hoel, "it does not matter where." The altered tone, the utter change of manner, was so striking that Jesse stopped short and began to wonder what had happened. He did not imagine it had anything to do with him or his business; but, all the same, it was too marked to be overlooked. Jesse's unnatural eloquence received a check. He even wondered if it had displeased Hoel, who, of course, was accustomed to a certain veiled respect, which, before now, Jesse had willingly accorded him. Jesse, even now, could not see Hoel's face clearly. He had seated himself where the shadow fell.

"You have thought me a little exacting," said Jesse.

"I knew you must be expecting me; but I own I put off coming as long as possible; besides, I have been three times out of town, and perhaps you are not aware that my uncle—the one I have mentioned as having brought me up—died suddenly. He was buried yesterday."

"Death seems nothing very terrible to a solitary man

like me; but I suppose to the rich there may be many regrets at leaving life."

"We are all alike, I suppose, in wishing to live as long as possible," said Hoel, and, strange as it seemed, it was as if the two men had now changed places—now it was Hoel who was blunt and straightforward, and Jesse inclined to show off a cynicism that fitted him but badly.

There was a pause—a pause which tried Jesse intensely, as he was thinking most about himself. Again it was he who broke the silence.

"I am afraid my business must have been an extra worry—a nuisance, in fact; but you know I was willing to go my own way. I did not wish to force my affairs upon the shoulders of any one."

"I have had very little to do with my uncle's affairs," said Hoel, in the same strange, unnatural voice, as if he had not heard Jesse's remark. "The family lawyer is a very useful man on these occasions, and is willing to undertake all the fuss that takes place when a man dies suddenly. Besides, my uncle did not sign his last will, and I count for nothing in one that stands."

Jesse, thus forced to leave his own thoughts, was ready to give sympathy.

"That seems hard, or would seem so to some men, but I do not think it will influence you much, Mr. Fenner. To me, you know, money means very little. A room to sleep in and a crust of bread are all that is necessary to man, and even if one's arms can not provide these, there is the work-house, though I own to a slight dislike of that idea." Jesse laughed. "Still, I can not altogether say I would prefer to starve than to enter the House, as the poor do. On the whole, it is less selfish to save your fellow-creatures the pain of finding you dead on a doorstep, or other such hospitable refuge."

"You are very happy, Vicary, you have only yourself to think of."

"Happy!"

This time the laugh was truly cynical.

"Yes, happy. You can fall back on past experience. You can have nothing to reproach yourself with; but you can not be stranded suddenly. You can not find yourself in a relentless storm, where nothing seems able to shelter you, and where there's not even a plank one can grasp. I

don't know why I've come here to-night. Well, yes, I was afraid you would think less of me; and I can't afford to lose any one's good opinion just now. I promised I would come. But look here, Vicary, it's no use beating about the bush in this insane manner, let me tell you at once, though I've come, I can do you no earthly good."

Hoel rested his elbow on the table, and with his well-shaped hand he shaded his face.

Still Jesse was entirely in the dark.

"Pray, don't let that distress you, Mr. Fenner. I never expected much result, as you know, least of all did I wish to have bothered you with my affairs just at a time when you were having troubles of your own. I have no relations except Symee; but I can understand that losing even one who did not much interest me would touch me in spite of myself. As for my own plans, I am prepared to fight on alone. You might have cleared the way; but what more could you have done? In your position, too, it was most generous, most kind of you to undertake to give me help, and please do not think I am ungrateful; it would really pain me to believe you thought so."

"You can not understand my motives, Vicary; but, at least, my inability to help you was not caused by inaction."

Jesse felt the blood mount to his face.

"Then you tried, and failed to discover anything?"

"I tried."

"And failed?"

Hoel did not remove his hand, so that Jesse could still see nothing of the expression. The situation was becoming exasperating.

"No."

Another pause, more awful than the others.

"Then, for Heaven's sake," said Jesse, starting up, and forgetting everything about relative positions, everything but the knowledge that the man before him had succeeded in finding out what he wanted to know, and yet that he would not tell him. "Then, for Heaven's sake, why do you not tell me? Is it worse than I told you? How can it be? Will my vengeance be greater because I am sure? Do you think that ignorance will lessen my bitter feelings? Mr. Fenner, you have been a kind friend to me, till now. I do not forget it, I am not ungrateful; but if you can not understand it, at least believe me when I tell you that this

is no laughing matter to me, that whatever you, or what some people call the world, think, to me it is of the utmost importance; believe, too, that I have been living an insupportable life since I saw you, that you can not, through any false notions of sparing me, wish to withhold the truth from me, however bad it is."

These words had rushed out like a pent-up torrent. Jesse Vicary never paused to think of anything or any one, his one effort was to prevent himself from shaking the truth out of the man before him. Something in the intense sadness of that immovable figure prevented him.

"Vicary, stop, for pity's sake. Remember that there are more persons than one to be considered in this question. But how can you consider? You have not the power. You can not know my feelings, my reasonings; but, look here, you say that I have been a friend to you. I don't altogether accept the term; but let that pass. If you consider me a friend, do something for me. If I promised to bring you back an answer, let me off my promise, because—because—unless you hold me to it, Vicary, I can not tell you."

Jesse sunk down on his chair again, and in a kind of amazed stupor he repeated:

"You can not tell me?"

"No."

"But you can not prevent my finding out in my own way. You hardly understand my motives, or what I conjecture to be the truth."

"No, I can not."

"Then, by Heaven, I will find out everything, and without any one's help."

"I feared so; but forgive me, Vicary, if you only knew, if—no, I can not offer advice; but can I say anything to make you desist? Look here, will you believe me when I tell you that, though I am tongue-tied, this I am sure of, working alone, you will go on the wrong track. Be generous. Leave it alone, Vicary. I am beginning to think that an overruling Providence is not a myth. Wait a few years—be patient."

"So that others may enjoy the fruit of my sufferings? No, I will not; if God is just, then He can not mind man seeking for that justice. Be it long or short, I will seek for it."

Hoel got up, Jesse's words had stung him like hail.

"Don't judge harshly, Vicary. You have let me off my promise. Thank you. Will you take my hand and forgive me?"

Vicary gave his hand, but there was nothing of the old grasp in it.

"Yes, I let you off, Mr. Fenner. I can do my work alone. I am sorry I ever troubled you with the story."

"Good heavens," said Hoel, as he walked away, "he little guesses the truth, and yet I—no, I could not tell him."

CHAPTER XVI.

HAPPY WAITING.

THERE was a drizzling rain, which came in slanting gusts along the valley, and made all the forest country look blurred and mysterious in the failing light. The loneliness seemed complete, for, except where the cottage lights shone like pale ghosts of themselves to those not far off, all human beings that were able to do so had retired in-doors. Over the Pools, which looked so desolate and so mournful, the mist settled in a thicker layer than usual, while the eddies made by the ruffled surface of the water as the slight wind passed slowly across it, added the last touch of sadness which the picture required.

But in the rich dwelling of Mr. Kestell all this cheerless damp and sadness were at this time invisible, for it was nearly dinner-time and every room was closely curtained, and the windows were barred.

Outside the pitter-patter of the misty rain was so soft that only occasionally could it be faintly heard, and the silence was broken now and then by the long howl of Neptune, the stable-dog, who was too ugly and old to have any fellowship with the pampered King Charles which Mrs. Kestell favored.

It was that happy, lazy time in an English household, when the ladies feel quite absolved from being busy. In half an hour there would be heard the dressing-bell, and it was not worth while to be too industrious. Besides, a little gossip makes the evening time less dull when all the day has been cheerless.

Mrs. Kestell was wonderfully cheerful, and Elva was all radiant happiness.

"And so the Fitzgeralds asked a great many questions, dear? I am sure they were jealous, they always are, those girls."

"They would be more jealous if they had seen Hoel," laughed Elva. "But, really, I never gave a thought to their opinion; I had no time. I managed to choose most of the important things; they will come down in a day or two, and I know you and Symee will find fault."

"No; you usually have very good taste, dear. I wish Amice had been with you, however, though of course she never does know what is fashionable."

"That does not matter at all, so that Hoel is pleased. He has such a keen eye for a woman's dress; I never met any man with such exquisite taste."

"And about his house. How will he furnish it?"

"I don't suppose he has begun to think of that. You see, his uncle's death put out all his calculations. He has had no time to write, even; I thought I should have had a letter by second post, but I have not. Amice dear, you are putting out your eyes working in that dark corner. Come here, on the hearth-rug."

"No, thank you; I am not working much," said Amice, dreamily; and something in the tone of her voice made Elva look anxiously at her sister. The look was coming into her eyes which Elva dreaded so much.

For two days Amice had been very strange and absent. What did it mean?

Elva got up from her chair, and stood on the hearth-rug, her beautiful figure and her bright, happy face were seen with a background of glowing light from the cheerful flames. Without knowing why, she felt uneasy and sad. Perhaps it was the slight pitter-patter, which became audible as she listened.

"Papa generally looks in. Has any one seen him since he came back from Greystone?" said Elva, to break the silence. She was twisting her engagement-ring round her finger, and suddenly it fell off and was hidden in the fur rug.

"Oh, dear, where is my ring? Amice, your eyes are good, come and help me to find it."

Amice at once came forward and stooped down.

"That comes of fidgeting, Elva," said her mother. "No, your father never came in to see me. I can not think why. He must have had some business to finish up for post time. It is a great pity he does not give up going to Greystone altogether. Amice dear, go and knock at the study door, and tell your father that it's time he left off writing."

Amice at this moment found the ring, and went slowly toward the door, as if very reluctant to obey her mother's command. The dressing-bell rang, and Elva, taking her sister's arm, went out with her.

"Amice darling, you have been indulging too much in fancies. Won't you let all strange ideas rest a little till after my wedding? When I am living in London you will have to come there very often. I believe Rushbrook is too lonely a place for you."

"No," she said, as her blue eyes looked sadly at Elva; "no, I love the loneliness; but oh, Elva, how can I—"

She broke off, because at this moment the study door opened, and Mr. Kestell came out of it and walked slowly upstairs without noticing his daughters.

"I feel sure papa had another bad night, and how terrible this sleeplessness is," said Elva, when her father's footsteps had died away. "I believe he is suffering; but he is so good and patient that he will not let us see it. He is afraid of making mother worry. Do you know, Amice, that when I think of papa, I pray that Hoel may be as loving and tender to me, when I am old and gray, as he is to mamma. Such love seems to make one realize what faithfulness means; because, from her long illness, it can not be said that mamma has been a real companion. I hope I shall never be an invalid. It is a great trial to a man. I see things so differently now. I want Hoel to find in me a real help, Amice. There is nothing like this love; and I do hope and pray that some day you may have it too. Only, I don't know if there is a man on earth worthy of you."

"There is a higher love," said Amice, softly.

"Yes, I know, theoretically; and in a way one believes it. Thomas à Kempis would have one only believe in a spiritual union of the human with the divine; but Thomas à Kempis never was engaged to be married."

Such a bright smile illuminated Elva's face that it was reflected on that of her sister.

"I want you to be happy in your own way, dear Elva," said Amice, as they paused on the landing just in front of the old clock whose pictorial representation of the moon's face so much annoyed the master of Rushbrook. "If you are happy, everything else will be easy to bear: but I am very anxious—"

"What about? Really, Amice, you are getting morbid."

"You have not heard from Mr. Fenner to-day?"

"No: but you know we agreed not to be plunged into despair if something hindered our letters. Hoel is so sensible. I should hate an exacting man."

"Mr. Fenner would not be generous. He does not really understand you, Elva."

Elva was not going to quarrel with her sister: so she only laughed as she entered her room and rang for Symee.

Symee had become very sad-looking since Jesse's departure. The rift between them seemed so terrible now that he was gone, and she worried herself by thinking it was her fault, and then braced herself up again by deciding that she had followed Mr. Kestell's advice, and had done the best she could for her brother at the expense of her own pleasure. If he misunderstood her, she could not help it.

Elva had been too much engaged with her own affairs to give much thought to Symee: but not so with Amice. And this evening, as she was dressing the youngest Miss Kestell, Symee was once more disturbed by her remarks.

"Have you heard from your brother lately, Symee?"

"Not very lately, Miss Amice: and when he writes now he is so altered. He will not forgive me, and yet I did it for his good."

"We can not always choose what is for the good of our friends," said Amice, sadly. "Will you mind my saying something, Symee, that has been a long time on my mind?"

"You always are so good to me, Miss Amice. Of course, you may say anything."

"I would not without your leave. I mean that I think you were quite wrong to forsake your brother. Oh, Symee, you can not know how much he may be wanting

you. You may be leaving him when he wants help. I don't know why, but I feel sure this is the case."

"But I should be ungrateful to Mr. Kestell and to you all. That is my first duty."

"No, I don't think so. We are rich, and money can procure anything almost; but your brother is poor, and he has only you. Oh, Symee, suppose it were my sister who wanted me, nothing would prevent me from going. If you are afraid of papa, I will take all the blame, Symee."

Symee burst into tears.

"Miss Amice, it is cruel of you to make me think it all over again and unsettle me. Besides, Jesse seems so strange now that very likely he would not have me."

"Then you are not afraid of being poor?"

Amice had touched a sore point.

"I should prefer waiting till Jesse was better off, of course; but—"

Amice sighed.

"It is the gold again," she said, under her breath. "It is beginning to be the ruin of other people."

At that moment Mrs. Kestell's bell rang, and Symee had to run off.

Several strange things happened this evening.

Mr. Kestell appeared to forget his usual habit of coming to the drawing-room before dinner; and it was Amice on whose arm Mrs. Kestell leaned.

He even kept the ladies waiting a minute before he joined them. Then he seemed brighter and more talkative than he had done for some weeks. There was quite a flow of conversation. He apologized for his unpunctuality by saying he had some letters to finish for the late post; and he even addressed some kind inquiries to Amice about her poor people.

"Didn't I hear you say, my dear, that some of the Moors were going to emigrate?"

"Yes, papa."

"Well, they will want to be rigged out, I suppose. Where are they going?"

"To Queensland."

"And imagine, papa," put in Elva, with the bright, sympathetic smile that was usually the herald of her speech when she addressed her father, "Mrs. Eagle Bennison has been to them, as the secretary of the T. A. P. S., to see if

they will begin at once to receive instruction. Mrs. Moor declined, saying she was too busy to be bothered with ladies' new-fangled ideas."

"I do think, Josiah, that you ought to speak to Mrs. Eagle Bennison about these odd societies. Mr. Heaton is so good-natured, he allows people to go their own way."

"Anyhow the Moors want some substantial help, so, Amice, spend up to twenty pounds for them. Every family that goes out of England is so much gain to the country, as each colonist is worth five to eight pounds to the mother country in exports. We ought to have state-aided colonization; but the government prefer wasting the public money over work-house tramps, to giving this same money for lasting benefit."

Amice did not assent, or even say thank you; and Elva could not help being sorry that her sister responded so little to her father's kind thoughtfulness. Perhaps when she, Elva, was married these two so dear to her would learn to understand each other better.

At this moment Jones re-entered the room.

"If you please, sir, there's a man come from Greystone, from the landlord of the Three Feathers, to say the man Button died to-day at five o'clock."

"Poor man!" exclaimed Elva. "Why, papa, in spite of all you have done for him, he has not pulled through."

Mr. Kestell sighed gently. Was it from sympathy or relief? No one there asked this question.

"Poor fellow! Well, he certainly received serious internal injury in that railway accident. Tell the messenger that I will pay his funeral expenses. I expect that is the meaning of the announcement."

Elva was silent for a little time. The thought of that railway accident brought back her anxiety and her great joy, also the remembrance of Walter Akister, which was not pleasant. He was away now, and she seemed more able to breathe freely when she walked out.

"Has he any relations?" she asked.

"Oh, I suppose at Westacre Lands he may have cousins."

Amice looked up, and gazed at her father. At this moment she knew the sigh she had heard was one of relief, and then she hated herself for the thought.

"Now, darling, you are going to bed," said Mr. Kestell

to his wife after dinner. "You look tired, and Doctor Pink said you must be careful."

There was the usual attendance on his wife, the same loving thought for her, which sent a new thrill of happiness into Elva's heart. She thought:

"Hoel will be like that, I hope; there is something so infinitely tender in such love."

And, thus thinking, she sat down to write to her lover, while Amice took out some work for the Moors' equipment.

"You might have thanked papa," said Elva, presently, looking away from her writing.

"I did not mean to use the money, so I thought it better to say nothing."

"Not accept twenty pounds, Amice!"

"No. Please, Elva, believe me that the money would do them more harm than good."

Elva laughed.

"Dreadfully *à la* Thomas à Kempis. Anyhow, keep the offer a secret, or the Moors will not indorse your decision."

Then the two relapsed into the silence of perfect sympathy, such a silence as few can give us except those who love us perfectly.

How long after this was it that Mr. Kestell's steps were heard, Elva could not remember afterward; but she was just writing, "Your own loving Elva," when her father said:

"Elva, dearest, come into the study. I want you."

And she rose at once, and walked quickly across the hall.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT AN END.

MR. KESTELL was not seated by the fire or at his table when Elva entered. Everything in the room was as usual; the shaded lamp on the table, the iron-work candelabras near the chimney-piece, which had been brought by a grateful client from Venice, held lighted candles, the fire burned brightly, and the hearth was shining and newly swept. The old bureau in the corner stood firm and solid in its place, like a trusted friend, the book-cases were also

like familiar surroundings, valued without being thought of separately.

Elva, as she entered, seemed to embellish it all, just as a master-touch in a dull picture will make the whole beautiful. Since her engagement much of her impetuosity had disappeared, or rather this sign of unsatisfied longing had been merged into thorough expectant happiness. She was rather molding herself too much on Hoel. Some of the old Elva had gone out of the picture, but it was there, ready to reassert itself; for character is almost like matter, indestructible; it has more than seven lives, and dies hard, if indeed it can be killed.

"Here I am, papa. Have I come to prescribe! You know I am a much better doctor for you than the ancient Pink."

She shut the door, and came toward her father who remained there so motionless. Suddenly Elva looked up and saw that something was the matter. All the gayety exhibited at dinner was gone. The gray, ashy look on the face, and the dull luster in her father's eyes were very visible.

"Papa, papa," she cried, and took both his hands in hers, and drew him toward the fire. "Sit down, darling; sit down. What is the matter?"

He obeyed her, and there came to her mind a former scene when she had told him that she would rather be the daughter of Kestell of Greystone than any lady of title.

Mr. Kestell made an effort to speak. He had not meant to give way. On the contrary, for several hours he had been bracing himself to be very strong.

"Hush, dear; it is nothing. One of my little sudden attacks. Lock the door, Elva, and let no one interrupt us."

Elva rose from her knees, and with a trembling hand obeyed. For the first time, something of the strange mystery came over her without her being aware of it in so many words. When she came back to her father's side she was deathly pale.

Sit down, dear; there, close to me; but just give me a few drops out of that bottle. Thank you. Your mother is upstairs; she will know nothing of this."

"Of course not, papa; but what is it? Please tell me quickly. I never was very patient. I am not like Amice."

Mr. Kestell looked for one moment into his child's face, and the expression of his eyes was like that of some dumb animal who begs for forgiveness.

"Elva, my dearest child, you have never given me a moment's anxiety, and you can never know what I would give at this moment to spare you pain; but—but I can not. Good heavens! that just when we were happy, when things might have gone on to the end, this should happen. Child! how can I spare you the news?"

"What news?"

Elva grasped a thousand possibilities, and tried to choose. Had they lost money? Was Rushbrook to be sold? Had Jones turned into a thief? or what—what— Never did one of these ideas connect itself with Hoel.

"I want you to be brave and to spare your mother. I have lived for that all my life."

"You know I will," said Elva, impatiently, so great was the tension of her nerves. "I always have; for your sake, papa, I would do it still more. But tell me at once."

Mr. Kestell rose again and put a trembling hand on his daughter's shoulder.

"I will. But think a little of your father, child. Your pain is doubled in him."

"My pain? What do you mean, papa? Our pain—what touches you touches us all—all except mamma; and I know she must be spared."

"No, Elva, this is yours, child. Will a double portion of my love make up for it? I could do everything but sacrifice your mother. You were so happy, you could not know that Mr. Fenner—"

"Mr. Fenner—Hoel?" Elva sprung up with fierce energy. "Papa, you do not know what you are saying. If it's about Hoel, tell me at once. Is he ill, or—or—"

She could not say dead; a cold shudder stopped the words on her lips.

"No, no, not ill, not dead. That would be better. But—he refuses to—to—" The words came thick and slow. "He wishes to break off your engagement."

Elva drew back two paces, as if her father's words were an insult to her and her lover. She even laughed, so absurd did the idea appear, and the laugh hurt Mr. Kestell more than tears would have done. Elva would not believe him.

"Papa, please don't say anything so foolish. Hoel and I have had no quarrel, we are perfectly at one in everything. Either you have quite, quite misunderstood some hasty words of his, or else you are dreaming or ill. Not for a moment do I believe you, and you must be witness that I say so. I will not do Hoel such a wrong—no, not for an instant."

She was the old Elva now—tall, and straight, and defiant; her cheeks, so pale a moment before, glowed with righteous indignation; she was standing up for Hoel's honor as well as her own.

"No, dear; I am not mistaken. I—I wish I were. His letter is quite plain, quite decisive. I want you to try and hide this from your mother, Elva; we must think of her."

Mr. Kestell repeated the words, as if this idea were the only thing he could feel certain about—to save his wife from all sorrow.

Elva became really impatient.

"Papa, it is cruel of you to try me like this. You know, as well as I do, that the thing is impossible; that Hoel and I have never had a word of difference." She paused, for she remembered those few words about Walter Akister, but that was so silly, that she would not retract. "Why should he suddenly write to you and break off our engagement? I repeat it—I do not believe a word of it. Let me see his letter. You have given me no reason, and you know he must have said something. Where is it?"

Mr. Kestell made no attempt to give it to her.

"His uncle died, and did not sign his will. Mr. Fenner expected to be his heir."

"Oh, is that all." Elva drew a deep sigh of relief. "Hoel is rather ridiculous about money. He said he was so glad you were only going to give us a little to begin with, as it was nice to be alike in everything. I don't care about money, so it made no difference to me. But even if his uncle had been so mean, you will not follow his example, papa? You have always said Amice and I should share alike; and I suppose we are rich? Or is it—yes, it must be, papa. You have lost money, and you have told Hoel, and he has some ridiculous idea about my not living as I have been accustomed to do. He has an honorable man's idea of honor just a little exaggerated. Have we

lost money? You know I am not afraid of the truth: I am not ill, like mamma."

Elva flung out the words defiantly.

"No; we have had no losses."

"Then Hoel thinks he has too little money to accept all mine? Ridiculous!"

"Yes, that's it," said Mr. Kestell, catching at a straw; "he has false ideas of honor."

"But no, he can't have. We went over all that before, and he quite, quite understood my feelings. Papa, don't be cruel; show me his letter."

"He inclosed a letter for you, my poor child. Will you have it?"

Mr. Kestell drew an envelope out of his pocket, and held it out to Elva. For one moment she hesitated. Was this some new trap laid for her? What was happening? She could not realize it in the least. She was not Elva; she was some one else going through this scene.

Very, very slowly she held out her hand and took it.

"Read it, dear," said her father, sitting down, and shading his face with his hand.

Elva did not sit down; she even walked away as far as possible from her father, and very slowly opened the letter. Yes, it was sealed with a little signet ring which Hoel always wore, engraved with his initials. She took care even now not to break the seal. Her eyes became dim, so that, for a few seconds, she remained staring at the words without taking in the least meaning. At last she read these words:

"My dear Elva,—For the last time I must write it. Your father will tell you what I can not say; but, believe me, nothing that has gone before this was false. It was true, as you were true. Why were we to love only to end like this? and yet I can not fight against Fate. I can not think. I can not say more than that it is best for both of us. We could not have been happy with the knowledge that I was indebted to your father for support. I would do much and suffer much; but, not this. I can not see you suffer. I shall suffer, but at least I shall not inflict suffering on you. Better now, than later, Elva, when we know that nothing could undo the past. Yet now, what will you think of me? I dare not dwell on that—I dare not.

I have begged for a long leave of absence, and no one shall know my address. Do not write; I could not bear it. Leaving you, I leave all that made life beautiful. What will you think—what can you think? I can not bear to believe you will blame me; and yet you must do so. There is no blame attached to you. You are innocent of this, entirely; but, Elva, let the world think it is your doing, or no—put the blame where you like; at least believe, if you can, that by doing this, and by asking this, I am sparing you greater misery.

"Good-bye; I dare not say more; I dare not see you. My resolution would break down, and all my life, at least, I have believed that my purpose was right. Why was I beguiled? Elva, you are good and generous, forgive, and, if you can, forget one who has so unwillingly given you and himself this pain. I am distracted. I can hardly believe in my own identity.

"HOEL FENNER."

From behind his shading hand Mr. Kestell had been intently watching his daughter.

"Elva, what does he say?" he asked, trying to steady his voice.

"Nothing. I don't know. It is all a mystery. Oh, papa, papa, can you explain it?" And with a gasp, as if she were being suddenly suffocated, Elva fell on her knees before her father, and laid her head on his knees.

"Hush, darling! It is some false idea; but it is irrevocable. He was utterly unworthy of you—utterly. You must forget him."

"Forget him, papa?"

"Yes, darling. You see he gives you no explanation, does he?"

"No. Papa, papa, I do not believe it; it is a dreadful plot. Who has done this? No, no, it can not be true. Hoel, Hoel! I trusted him entirely! I will write, I must write; he will understand that it can not be a case of money between us. I did not love him at first, he taught me to love him; and now I can not, can not believe it."

Mr. Kestell almost groaned; his child's words seemed more than he could bear, and suddenly Elva remembered him.

She raised her head and took hold of his hand.

"Papa, I was forgetting you. You have always been so good, so very good to me. I could not help saying all this; only now even, though, I really don't believe it. It will come right, won't it? God won't let me suffer like this. It is wicked of me to believe it, even against Hoel. There is some explanation I can not understand. If I could go to him and just hear him talk, I know he would understand what my love is. Papa, you know. You have given it to mamma all your life. You can understand."

"No, no, child. She is my wife. That is very different. You will, in time, forget."

Elva was angry now.

"Forget? If I do, I shall not be different; but please don't let us say any more. I will write to Hoel. He can not be gone yet. He will come here. Of course he will. If I only knew what he means I could tell better what to say. It is a bad dream."

She rose up and walked toward the door. She could not sit still. Mr. Kestell said nothing, and something in his silence struck her.

"Papa, you are not thinking hard things of Hoel, are you? I am sorry I spoke out my thoughts. I was taken by surprise. He is quite incapable of being dishonorable, quite. He fancies his own honor is touched—how, I do not know; but I feel sure it is that. He will see reason when I write to him. Poor Hoel! When he comes down, you will not be angry with him, will you? Promise me."

"Elva, can't you see, a man who writes like that means what he says. He will never come. He is utterly unworthy of you. Child, do not make yourself more unhappy by hoping. He is a—a—"

"Hush, papa, don't say the word. Hoel could never be a scoundrel; I am sure of that, quite sure. You will see that I am right when I get his answer. Now, I promise I will say nothing to mamma; we will keep all this worry from her. Why, of course, true love never runs smooth. I should have believed ours had not been true if—"

"Elva, don't! Listen. Hoel Fenner's mind is made up. He is leaving England. He has treated you badly; I never wish to see him again. He will never re-enter this house. Never!"

"But our wedding will be here," said Elva, slowly, as if all the past remarks had been forgotten.

"Good heavens," said the master of Rushbrook, sinking down into his chair, "if I could have foreseen! Elva, won't you pity me a little? do you think I would deceive you in this? No, child. Mr. Fenner will never return, never; it is not your fault, but, indeed, believe me, it is best so, he is not a man to forgive. Leave me now; I can not bear any more, he is unworthy of you. In his place, what should I care?"

Elva did not understand these words: but she saw that her father looked terribly ill and crushed. Her love for him was too great to leave him in this condition. She came back and laid her face against his.

"Papa, don't make yourself ill for my sake. Let us say no more till Hoel's answer comes. I will be brave for your sake. But, alas! at this moment her love crushed him more than her anger.

"Thank you, darling," he said; "I shall get better soon; leave me now; I want nothing."

When the door had shut, Mr. Kestell rose and paced his room very slowly. The slight exercise did him good—it helped him to bear the intense strain which made all his perceptions so acute. He took Hoel's letter from his pocket, and once more read these words—words which he could not have shown to Elva.

"Why I will never touch a penny of your money, you, sir, must know; I can not tell your daughter, neither can I require you to tell her. I am powerless. I can not redeem my word to her, and I will not clear myself at the expense of her life-long happiness. I can not hide anything from my wife. I will not make her hate me by giving my true reasons.

"For the rest, I leave myself in your hands. The inclosed note will sound strange to her; but in saving my honor and hers I shall appear, what I am not—a traitor to myself and others. I can but prove the contrary to you by my absence and my silence."

"What does he know?" groaned Mr. Kestell. "It seemed an impossible chance. Who has put the links together? Button is dead, Jesse could not, and Amice—no, no, it can not be my own daughter; but, for Elva's sake, I can still bear it. Others love her, must love her better. In his place, ah! in his place—"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAW OF A MAN'S OWN MIND.

A WEEK had gone by. A week—what work will it not accomplish, this unrelenting, eternity-like time, this ever-moving yet changeless time. It works; it is never idle. It heals wounds; but also it conceals lasting sores; it brings rest and creates restlessness, and calls itself the great healer, and yet many say that it destroys as often as it heals. The knowledge of time forces us to believe in eternity.

To Elva Kestell that week was as the foretaste of purgatory. It uprooted every belief she had seemed to possess; it made her doubt in goodness, in faith, in everything; but it did not crush her. When the forge-hammer comes down upon the metal, then its strength is tested. Elva refused to be crushed, and, during that week, she gave Hoel a week to answer as the limit of time. She went about as usual; she stopped none of her preparations, and not one word about the subject escaped her lips.

A week was ample time for Hoel to answer. She had written to his lodgings. He could hardly be gone, or, if gone, he could not have gone far. Her letter would be sent on; he would write and explain everything. It was not possible to keep silent—not possible. But the week went by, and Elva said, "Ten days."

Then ten days went by, and Elva began to realize, yes, only began then to realize, that something had happened which would alter all her life.

Had she known some reason, she said, "I could have borne it;" but to have none, none; to have this curtain let down suddenly, which hid all the joy of her life, was maddening. Worse still, her pride—and Elva was naturally proud, though she had hardly realized it before—began to assert itself. A less strong proud nature would have been crushed—struck down by this sudden storm. Elva, on the contrary, stood up straighter, and called up all her pride to her help.

She must have been utterly mistaken. She had given her best, her sweetest, to a man who, in a moment, could cast it from him. It seemed so strange, so utterly impos-

sible, that no theory could fit into it, no ordinary rules explain it.

Now the days of suspense were over. She was thankful for these ten days of silence, even in her agony, for she thought: "I have now the power to face the world. It must be faced. I will take it on myself—let him go free. I can be generous if he is incapable of being so."

So, one cold, cheerless November afternoon, Elva entered the study before the lamp had been brought in, and just when the uncertain wintery light blurred the outline of every object, and she said, quite firmly:

"Papa, will you do something for me?"

Mr. Kestell had been better since that fatal day. He seemed to have rallied his powers. Still, the sight of Elva was a daily sorrow.

"Yes, darling; anything for you."

"Will you tell mamma and other people that our engagement is broken off, and that I am responsible for it. I am. If he came now I would say the same. It is ten days since we spoke about it."

"My poor child; he will never come back. You are right."

"Don't pity me, please. Spare me what people will say. But no, they will not dare say anything to me, and I need not think of the rest. I will tell Amice."

Elva had gone through her task, and she walked out of the room. When she reached the hall she paused. Then she noticed that Amice's umbrella was not in its accustomed place. Her sister must be visiting her poor people; but she would soon return. In the sitting-room Elva heard Symee's gentle voice reading aloud to her mother.

How desolate the place was! Every corner seemed more or less associated with Hoel. "Hoel, Hoel, Hoel," she called out, silently; and no answer could come. "You won my love," she said, "and now you have despised it. Was it so worthless? No, no; I know it was not. I would have loved you so truly. I would have helped you in everything; but you despised me and what I could give. Perhaps you always thought little of women, and now find that you made a mistake in fancying I was able to help you. Why should I mind, if he does not? But I do—I do; though no one shall ever know it. Other girls have been forsaken, jilted. Some have died of it; but I will

not—no, I will not. Why am I not like Amice? She would not have been bound by the human love, she would have soared higher. I have not done this—I can not."

She hastily put on a red cloak and a hat that hung in the hall, and went out down the drive and through the gate which led out upon the bridge. Ah, just here she had met Hoel; and here, yes, here, Walter Akister had crossed their path, and had scowled on them. Had his curse borne fruit? Strange, foolish fancies. She walked on and stood on the bridge. All was terribly desolate. It had rained in the morning, and the tree-twigs were still moist and dripping. A gray shade was over the landscape; out yonder on the high lands the winds would be blowing, here it was sheltered. Elva would willingly have gone off at once upon the wild forest land, and tried, as in the old days, to feel the same freedom as before, to feel that she was one with Nature; but it was too late now, and, besides, all was out of tune. The peace which belongs to Nature, even in her wildest moods, and which Elva had shared, in spite of strange, unfulfilled longings, was gone—gone. The discord that belongs to the human race, as apart from so-called inanimate nature, had entered her heart.

"I am not the same," she thought, as, disregarding damp and dripping, she leaned over the parapet. "I never shall be again, never; I can not be resigned. I am not good, I can not understand, I will not see that it is right; it is not right. No, no; but I will try and hide it from the world. That is all I can do."

Future aggravating details presented themselves to her, just as a man might be annoyed by the buzzing of flies when he was lying mortally wounded. The Fitzgeralds would be so curious, Mrs. Eagle Bennison would condole, Miss Heaton would lift her eyebrows, and even George Guthrie, her old friend, would perhaps tease her. How she hated the thought of all this; she could have borne her misery better if she might have retired to a convent, or gone right away; but where could she go alone? Her mother would not hear of such a thing, and Amice and she could not both leave together. Life was hateful, only made up of suffering, only—

She looked up and saw Amice standing close beside her.

"Elva dear, it is damp; why are you here?"

"I was waiting for you."

"For me? I am coming in-doors." Then the hardness of the tone struck Amice. She had guessed something was the matter, but had not dared to think of it. "Elva, something is the matter; tell me."

"The matter; yes, and no. My engagement with Mr. Fenner is broken off; but you were never very friendly with him—you will not mind much."

Amice remained speechless. The curse had indeed fallen, and Elva was so hard over it, which meant that she was suffering intensely.

"Did you break it off?" she murmured.

"I shall say so."

"To clear him. Oh, I never thought he would be so cruel. I see now he was not worthy, not worthy of you; and yet, when I saw him, I—"

"You saw him," said Elva, passionately. "When? Tell me, did he come here?"

She seized Amice's hand with an energy which she had never used before.

"Yes, he came here."

"And you saw him? Why did he not ask for me?"

"I do not know. Leave it alone; leave it alone. He was not worthy of you."

How strange that Amice should use the same words. But what had Hoel done?

"You must, you shall tell me where you saw him!"

"In the wood. Oh, Elva, don't ask me any more. I do not know; but it is the—"

"The what?"

"The curse of gold. It has fallen on you, too."

"What nonsense, Amice; you have said things like that often. You imagine because we are rich that we must be cursed. It is utterly false. And if Hoel has this idea, too, then he is very wrong. But he knew all about it before—before I loved him."

"Does mamma know? What will papa do?"

"Do? Amice, you madden me. I tell you I take it on myself, entirely."

"But it is not true." And Amice raised her blue eyes to her sister's face, and then clung to her.

"Oh, Elva, Elva, if I could have borne this for you I would have done so—so willingly! Surely if we are punished, there may be a place found for repentance."

"Repentance, his—then—"

"He is ungenerous, he is not noble. But it is a law, such a pitiless law—the just for the unjust."

Elva did not understand; she was not trying to do so. Suddenly she gave way.

"Amice, Amice, you are so good. You have never loved so entirely, so helplessly, as I have done. What can I do? What shall I do? I loved him so much, so much. I do now, even now, though my heart seems filled with bitterness. It is not I that have given up, he has done it, and without giving me one reason, Amice; do you hear—not one? I am young and strong; it will not kill me. I am well, quite well, even after these ten days. Ten days—do you believe me?—ten days, and not one line. It is true—true. But you must tell no one. Sometimes I feel I must hate him, and yet I can't. If I could I should be happy. I have prayed—yes, prayed to think little of him, and I can't—I can't."

Was this Elva? How changed she was. Amice knew now that some great turning-point had come—the curse, whatever it was, in its fullness. Hoel Fenner knew it, and he had forsaken the doomed house. Why should he join his lot with theirs? And yet Elva knew nothing of it—must know nothing of it—she who so loved her father.

How was she to offer comfort? There was but one way. And there, on the bridge, with the weariness of the damp day spreading itself over the beautiful valley, and over the dank grass by the weird Pool, Amice resolved.

"I don't know how, but somehow there must be restitution—somewhere; and then— Oh, prayer is powerful, and God must hear me. Let it fall on me, but not on her!"

Aloud, she said:

"Tell me how I can help you."

"How? Never mention his name; let me forget him. I must, I must in time. But, Amice, he may yet come."

"He will never come."

"How do you know? Are you all in league against me?"

"Come in, dear Elva. Is it not best to know the truth?"

"The truth? There is none. Well, let us go in, and

keep my counsel. You and papa accept the inevitable easily."

How terrible was Elva's bitterness to Amice!

"Me and papa. He said Mr. Fenner would not come back?"

"Yes; he said so ten days ago."

"The bitterness of death is manifold," said Amice, half to herself, as the two went back.

As they entered the house, the wind swept up the valley, and seemed to heave one long sigh.

As they passed up the drive, Amice instinctively looked toward her father's study windows. One of them had no shutter up, as Mr. Kestell liked to be able to look out. A red curtain was drawn across; but it was illuminated by a lamp behind it.

Elva noticed the look, and answered it.

"Papa is very good. I will try and spare him. He will tell mamma. I don't think I could do that. She will ask so many questions."

"Yes," said Amice.

Their steps on the gravel were heard plainly in the study. Mr. Kestell was there, and moved the curtain slightly aside to see out. It was only for an instant. One glance seemed to tell him it was Elva and her sister.

He let the curtain drop and walked back to his knee-hole table, and sat down in his arm-chair. That interview with Elva had tried him severely; but also it had given him strength. All the time she had been out he had been recovering himself; only now he could put his thoughts together.

"She has left off expecting him now. It is better so. Let me see what can be done. A few weeks more, and it would have been all right—a wife has so much power over her husband, so very much. Still, a little thing may disturb a whole life. I will think that it is best. Only cowards go back on the past. The future is in the hands of everybody. One can do so much for the future. How much or how little does he know? or is it mere guesswork? He saw Button. I have found that out. Button died a week too late. He had great vitality, that man. Had he guessed something? Anyhow, again, I was right. I have those deeds. Had they been in his posession I could not have taken them away. He left them here till he

should call for them. They are waste paper to everybody. Quite useless—not worth the paper they are written on. That is all on the safe side."

Mr. Kestell paused, and his hand nervously took up several papers and letters and replaced them under his letter-weights.

"Vicary knows nothing; he would have been down here at once. He may guess; but, if so, he guesses wrong. He can be made to accept my offer. Card will oblige me in this—he is not a questioning man. Fenner is away. It all came of their making friends. Who could have foreseen and prevented that? No one. Without work, Vicary must turn his thoughts to another country. It is so usual to emigrate now; every one who can't get on here does it. I have done nothing but what was kind and good toward him. Without me, they would have been work-house children. Another man would have given up or sold that property at once. I waited and lent the money.

"I have robbed them of nothing, nothing—not a penny piece. Here is my account-book. The sums spent during all those years. It comes to over four hundred pounds. The rest I gave them. I don't grudge it in the least."

Mr. Kestell ran his fingers through his white hair.

All these words passed through his mind; they were even pronounced mentally by him with the same distinctness as if he had spoken them aloud; but at the same time he seemed to possess two clear identities, and this other self scorned the words of justification much as the publican might have scorned the Pharisee's words, had he heard them.

Yes, this other self scarce lifted up his eyes as he listened, and then both were silent as Mr. Kestell, in the flesh, rose again and went to a tiny drawer inside the flap of his old bureau. From the drawer he took with trembling fingers a small bottle. It was labeled and corked down firmly, with a bit of skin carefully fastened over the cork.

Mr. Kestell walked with it to the window, held it up to the light, and examined it closely. He must have done this before, as all his actions seemed mechanical.

"It seems strange not to believe in death when a few drops of this would kill one. Very strange! Other people die—every one must die. This is easy to believe; but that

we ourselves die, must die, that is a difficult problem. Sooner or later that veil must be withdrawn. I have done so much for life, so much for their lives and their happiness, so much for hers, why not venture a little more. Some events in life are like a snow-ball, they become so huge as they go on, they accumulate results—strange results, too.

"But why fight on? Why not end everything to-night, and to-morrow be—where? That uncertainty is the crux. Religion used to touch me; now it lays a cold hand on me; it chills me; I can not believe in it. Its influence has been lessening for years ever since— But these thoughts are useless. I am a fool, and I know it. Man talks of a hundred paths he may choose, when in reality he is forced but to follow one; and that a very narrow one.

"Hoel Fenner has gone away pluming himself on his probity, on his high-flown sentiments. Put into a place of trial, he fails at once. He might have come forward and married her; he has enough to live on, and he has a good profession; he need not have touched a penny of my money. If the righteous are blind, then some hypocrites can see plainly. Judged by a higher law, Fenner is a scoundrel, who congratulates himself on his honorable motives. He loves himself first, best. He would never have understood my child. Elva, Elva, why should the sins of the fathers be visited on the innocent? Who says that is right? No, no, a thousand times no!"

Mr. Kestell walked back to his bureau and replaced the bottle.

"Not this one—no; not now, not yet. But I must get Pink to give me some stronger draught for sleeping. I must sleep. Surely something can give me sleep. To-night, especially, I want it, for to-morrow I must tell my dear wife. That will be hard; she will feel it. At least let her rest now—one more night.

"How many men are there who have nothing to hide—nothing? Not one, if they were put in the witness-box, not one. Witness-box—what do I mean? Only for great crimes, glaring crimes, men get there. But for the others— The judges would have enough to do. And who would judge the judges?

"Poor Elva! poor child! Is it her words, her expression, that has made me like this? For one moment to feel

free—free, how would it be? But to face the world, to face my wife— No, no. A man has but one path to choose, the same that he entered long ago. There is no such thing as choice and free will—no such thing. There is but one law—self-made; yes, that is it—the law of a man's own mind."

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PART III.

CHAPTER I.

SELF-EXILED.

BOULOGNE has charms of its own, though the long quay and the constant new works which one sees going on in its harbor remind one too much of short and unpleasant journeys across the Channel. However, one feels that in spite of having much in common with every sea-port town, Boulogne is on foreign soil. The quaint dresses of the fishwives, the patient plodding labors of the seafaring folk, their children, and the imperfect drainage are un-English. Leaving the quay we plunge into still more quaint thoroughfares and narrow streets, the old people are brown and bewrinkled and picturesque, and the colored handkerchiefs are twisted in a manner unknown to our Portsmouth or Southampton poor.

The difference of race and creed, or thought and manner of living impresses itself at every step on the stranger, and for some time Hoel Fenner had been quite contented to vegetate here in a comfortable hotel, believing he was amassing valuable notes on the life of a foreign sea-port town which would be most acceptable to his paper when served up as brilliant articles.

One reason of his stopping so soon in his continental journey was his belief that here he would meet with few English. Any of his friends would as soon have gone up in a balloon as stopped at Boulogne in the winter; the Riviera was the thing, or else Rome or Naples—but Boulogne! No, certainly. Here, then, Hoel could breathe;

and if he kept away from the harbor at the time of the arrival of the steamers he felt safe from intrusion.

But when Boulogne relapsed into its normal state of fish shouting and sabot clip-clapping, Hoel might be seen constantly pacing round that great semicircle of harbor quay, smoking and looking about with indifferent eyes. He smiled at himself for being capable of vegetating in this way, but smiling meant that he was wondering if he were really the Hoel Fenner who so short a time ago had been the happiest of men—and now! He was not himself; and yet every characteristic seemed even more than ever crystallized in him. Sometimes he felt that it would be better to take his passage in the next steamer and go at once to Rushbrook House. Elva would be there—Elva the embodiment of a perfect woman. He had not great powers of visualization, still he could recall her words, her pose—now and then her face flashed across a dark disk of his imagination, then was gone—but this was the Elva, of his first dream. Having once seen a beautiful pearl in an exquisite and appropriate setting, you do not necessarily recognize it as the same when it has been ruthlessly torn from its perfect surroundings.

That Elva, although the same in every way, had gone, gone from him and forever. So he said and thought over and over again, while he walked wearily round that quay.

When this painful time was over, he thought, when the vision of Elva had vanished—as of course it would vanish with time—he would never again stop at Boulogne! He should hate the place; he sickened at the bare idea of going through such another period as this, and yet he *would* go through it. Time was the healer; every man and woman who retains a certain amount of common sense—and Hoel had much of this commodity—knows perfectly well that time does heal, or at all events closes every wound. If enough patience can be found to go through the bridging interval, then we may hope for quiet again, and for something which we may call peace. It is only the raving lover, or the half madman, swearing he will die of disappointment, who fancies it is otherwise. What many men have gone through, surely we are capable of bearing. So argued Hoel, forcing this common sense down his own throat, till he was sick to death of it, and yet he clung to it as his one

safeguard against becoming like the raving lover or the weak fool.

And yet he was much aggrieved that something had gone wrong; before now everything had turned up trumps for him, and now craven Fortune had forsaken him just when he was most capable of co-operating with her. Pshaw! was he going to be made miserable by all this? Certainly not! Others might rave or plunge into excitement, but he should do no such weak things. He would live down every feeling of disappointment and love, and, what was more, he would live it down at Boulogne.

There were two very decided natures struggling within him. The one made up of the concentrated selfishness of years was the stronger, and trampled on that new-born nature of pure and unselfish love which had been with him so short a time; strange that such a weakling could not be more easily crushed and annihilated; but patience was wanted, and must be invoked—give it time and the stronger nature must win. Hoel repeated this to himself, though he called his former selfishness peace of mind.

One firm resolve he mentally uttered many times. He should never again set foot in Rushbrook House—never!

He had two private rooms in the Hotel Tamise. The coming and going was nothing to him; he had given no address, and he cared nothing if his letters accumulated.

Let them accumulate. What human soul did he care for now? None! His uncle's business was looked after by the new heir; he had washed his hands of everything.

He waited for Time to finish her work, and Time seemed extraordinarily slow over the task. What! Still that undefined gnawing feeling, still those flashes of Elva's face —would they never go? He began to get slightly impatient with Time.

One day he passed an English lady on the stairs. He took no special notice of her, till just as he came close to her he raised his head, and then he felt a sharp stab at his heart. How was this? Had not Time done better than that? Merely because there was some very slight resemblance to Elva in this stranger, was he to be thrown into such a state? He flung himself into an arm-chair in his private sitting-room and determined once for all not to be the plaything of feeling and of passion in this way. How could he, Hoel Fenner, who had been master of himself

for years, turn into this weak wretch? He hated Fate, and the world, and the strange circumstance which could never have been foretold, and he hated every one that was happier than himself at this moment, and yet he had strength to make a vow that this sort of thing was never to happen again—never!

How could he help on the work of Time? Her progress seemed still very slow: indeed, something else must be tried.

He had a pile of books on his table—for books had always been dear friends to him—and he hardly dared own to himself that now sometimes it had been an effort to stretch out his hand for some of his favorite classics.

It was a very mild winter, and he managed to get the proprietor of the hotel to keep him warm, and give him almost English-like coal. Creature comforts would surely help Time to do her work! It was no good scourging your body to heal your heart—that was much too mediæval in this prosaic age. It belonged too much to the raving lover type: far be it from Hoel Fenner!

Life was a mistake—perhaps—yes, it was a failure. Looking round it dispassionately, Hoel found nothing wherewith to supply what he had lost. Politics might succeed, but politics had never been in his line. They savored too much of the one-sided enthusiast; a politician was bound to be one-sided. Hoel was accustomed to pride himself on his fairness and on seeing all round a subject.

One day he became aware that it was Christmas-eve. There was a fluttering of peasants' garments up toward the church on the hill.

The priests looked full of importance; and by way of something to do, Hoel sauntered into the big church and saw that a Crèche was being made. It was poetical; and he languidly took notes for his articles: he tried to put down a few ideas that had not already been thoroughly written up. Hoel was so well read that he was sometimes hampered in his writing. It was tiresome to repeat old ideas, knowing them to be old, even though pretty certain no one would find it out. Looking at the Crèche, he could mentally sketch out a whole paper on the growth of myths, he could remember examples from the religious history of most of the European countries, he could trace out Christmas legends that had traveled and changed garments in one place and added this or that overcoat of fiction in another.

He settled at last that really there was very little that was new and interesting to be said on this subject, so he sauntered out of the church more discontented than before, and, what was worse, he knew that Christmas-day would bring him more hateful thoughts about Elva, and what would have been his wedding-day.

Maddening all this was: but then that period once passed, say in three weeks. Time would have more chance of doing her work; so he returned to the hotel, and plunged into some odes of Horace. Horace had a sly, sensible way of looking at things, and one can at times catch the spirit of an author—or one can try to do so.

Christmas-eve was all very well for children, it should be abolished for grown-up folk; that fooling about a happy Christmas was becoming unendurable, even to the rational being. Had Hoel been staying in a country house, or say with the Heatons, he would of course have gone to church, and stood out the service with gentlemanly decorum: but here alone at Boulogne, there was no need to hunt out an English church, with most likely a dreary congregation and a dreary ritual, or the want of one. No, that was quite unnecessary. Hoel did not attempt it. But somehow the day seemed to shroud itself in ghastly dreary grave-clothes. Something was missing—something! good gracious, everything! Ah, Jesse Vicary, with his well-fortified faith, would have made a better business of this. Well, but Jesse Vicary, if he knew the truth, would his faith make any difference to him? Was religion a real or an imaginary power, even to those ultra enthusiasts?

So the day wore away, and toward evening when the darkness had come out, and only the lamp-lights, like fallen stars, joined earth and the starry sky, Hoel sauntered down to the quay for something to do, and to get away from his own thoughts.

On and on he walked, then back again; it was not cold, and he hated going in to his loneliness. From mere curiosity he paused at last, and saw a few sailors finishing the lading of a small steamer. It was the "Service du Nuit," somebody said; but the water was low, and the boat looked a miserable specimen of its class as Hoel stooped over and looked at it.

Suddenly an English voice struck on his ear. He seemed to know it, and turned round quickly. Hidden by

the shadow of a custom house in front of him stood Walter Akister, angrily accosting a sailor in broken French.

"The boat doesn't go till two in the morning. The tide won't be right till then."

"Why does the company not warn one of this? It's abominable."

"The boat will go all right," said the Frenchman, reassuringly.

"What! that little nutshell? what on earth—"

"Monsieur should have gone on to Calais. The night service there meets the train."

Forgetting their last meeting, Hoel stepped forward to help the Englishman out of his difficulty.

"Won't you come back with me to my hotel, Mr. Akister?" said the courteous Hoel, and Walter Akister turned sharply round to behold the man he hated.

"Here! you?" he said, in a low tone, and almost savagely, as the Frenchman, delighted to get away from the bad-tempered Englishman, walked away and left them alone. The sailors had finished their work and departed; the night patrol was some way off, and the two—once rivals, if unconsciously so—stood face to face in the gathering darkness, for the shops were shut, and some of the *cafés* were closing.

"Yes, I am here; but I should be much obliged if you will not mention having seen me," said Hoel, suddenly feeling he had done a foolish thing in coming forward. What was Walter Akister to him but a mere chance acquaintance?

"Mention it—to whom?" said young Akister; and few as the words were, Hoel heard plainly the anger that prompted them.

"To any one who may know me."

"Do you fancy I should mention your name to any one at Rushbrook? I do not wonder you are afraid that your dastardly conduct—"

"You are forgetting—" began Hoel, whose rising color was not visible, but who suddenly felt the blood boil in his veins. What did this fool mean? Hoel was older, and was not going to put up with any nonsense.

"Forgetting! I have only just heard that you have behaved in a way no gentleman—"

"Stop!" said Hoel, in a voice of suppressed anger.

"You have no right to express an opinion on my private affairs; neither have you any knowledge of—"

"Of the fact that you have behaved in a way no gentleman—"

At this moment something very unforeseen happened. Hoel could bear much, but not this. He had raised his stick, intending to chastise the impertinence of this arrogant youth; but Walter Akister saw the movement. He was stronger than Hoel and of bigger frame. The arm he raised, not caring how it fell, was a powerful one, and unfortunately the two men were standing on the edge of the unprotected quay. But as it happened, Hoel stepped back before the blow fell, and he found himself the next instant falling, falling into a dark, hideous depth. Then he struck the water, sunk, struggled to free himself from something, struggled to keep his self-possession and to strike out, but something held him down—or what was it? The water was bitterly cold—he was sinking again. Why had he not been able to swim? Good God, was this the end? Nonsense! the end! Elva! Elva!—what did all *that* matter compared to her—what? More struggling; was he sinking? How the water choked him; he must rise again. Was it his overcoat that was weighing him down? Elva! that young idiot—strange mistiness of mind—shouting—was he going to remain eternally below water? He had been twice down, down—then a desire for help, man's help. He was rising again, gasping painfully. He was conscious of intense desire to live, and not to be ingulfed in this hideous blackness; he was conscious again of hearing eternal shouting, and of a light cast on the water, conscious again of help coming, of a strong arm grasping him, of—but things looked hazy now, as if seen in a mist, quite apart from the darkness or the bright light upon the water. He made one last effort to strike out, and a feeling of utter despair and exhaustion overwhelmed him, and then he remembered no more till he woke up in the bedroom of his hotel, and still in the same hazy way noticed that several men were near him, one of them a face he had seen in the darkness. Akister, that young fool! but even this effort seemed too much for him, and he felt himself sinking again into a black, hideous pit. He fancied that some one was chaining him down, some one—yes, Walter Akister. He was lost, lost! Was this, was this—the word

never was even thought out, for there followed another blank.

CHAPTER II.

HOEL'S TEACHER.

It seemed a long time again after this before Hoel recovered further consciousness; but this time it was of a more satisfactory kind. He felt very weak and very helpless, but he no longer imagined himself to be anywhere but in this rational world of ours. There was a Sister of Charity in the room, and Hoel was soon able to put the facts together in a lucid manner. He remembered falling into that water —thinking of it, it was strange he should ever have been got out of that black pit. Naturally he had been ill, and had been nursed in the hotel. They had got a sœur to come and attend upon him. What a capital institution they were, these sisterhoods! and with his usual aptitude Hoel considered how foolish it would be to put down religious communities. He turned his eyes toward the quiet figure, and felt rested by the look. The sœur was very nice-looking, and she was working at something so that she seemed like some delightful idea of repose. Presently instinct told the sœur that her patient had moved, and she came toward him, and spoke in French.

Hoel thought it was a good thing he was a French scholar.

"Monsieur would like something to drink?"

Hoel smiled an assent; and he found out he was too weak to lift his hand to the glass, and that, in fact, he was being treated like a baby. Strange!

"I have been ill?" he said after a time.

"Yes, monsieur, a long time, a very long time; but now you are going to be well."

"A long time?" said Hoel, slowly, for he was surprised.

"Yes, indeed; monsieur has had fever. It was the chill in the water; but the doctor is sure you will get well, only we must not be in a hurry."

"The doctor?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Docteur Chaumas. He is very clever; he came first to you, and he has been so good."

"Thank you," said Hoel, these being the only words

he felt equal to saying. Then he felt tired, and dropped off to sleep. He could not arrange his thoughts very easily, and he seemed to have too many to settle. The sœur shaded the light from her patient's face, and waited patiently. As she sat there she seemed to be the embodiment of patience, beautiful patience, which has nothing to do with the fever of the world or its restlessness. How had she got it?

Presently there was a knock at the door, and the doctor entered. He was a short stout man, with a most benevolent face and twinkling eyes.

"Ah, the *bonne sœur*, and how is your patient?"

"But such a change! He is himself again; but weak, ah, so weak! Like a child!"

"Good! we shall pull him round. No letters or anything to show that his friends know?"

"Nothing!"

"Well, really these English people are most extraordinary! I have said it before, *n'est ce pas*, Sœur Marie? And this one is no exception. He falls over the quay, is overweighted by his clothes; he has been talking to a friend, as we suppose, who with heroic courage jumps into the water after him, saves him, and comes back with him here, sees he has everything, and then goes off, leaving neither name nor address in order that we may tell him how his friend is getting on. Extraordinary!"

"Yes, indeed. And how nearly he died, and no one would have known."

"It was a mere chance he lived; and all that raving in English! If one must have delirium, *ma foi*, Sœur Marie, let it be in French, for it sounds twice as horrible in that barbarous language, doesn't it?"

The doctor and the sister laughed softly; it was the only bit of national pride they could indulge in, for in no other way had they shown it in respect to their care of the patient.

"Strange that such a handsome and rich gentleman has not a relation," said Sœur Marie, again turning toward Hoel, who, in spite of his altered appearance, was still good-looking.

"No address! The proprietor said he had only England on his luggage, but that he paid well, and there was money in his possession."

"Monsieur Durand was not afraid of not getting his

money, besides, he is a good man, and had the gentleman been poor he would not have turned him out," said the sister, gently.

M. Chaumas went up to the bed and felt his patient's pulse and looked attentively at him.

"He is very weak. That was a sharp attack of fever he has had; it will be some weeks yet before he can do anything. He will have you to thank for his life."

"He will have to thank God," said the sister, softly.

M. Chaumas shrugged his shoulders and twinkled his eyes.

"You put it that way, I put it the other. Imagine this sick man without a devoted nurse like yourself, Sœur Marie, and then tell me, would he have lived?"

"A man's life is in God's hands."

"Well, I am going. I'll look in to-morrow. There's nothing now we can do but to watch him carefully and feed him constantly. There are a few symptoms I don't like; but if we are to cheer him up after all this, we must get at his relations. Ask him, Sœur Marie, as soon as he is able to write, when you can send for his friends."

Then the sister was left again with her unfailing store of patience and her contemplation. There are some women who are a mystery to most of their fellow-creatures, because they are not governed by the ordinary rules of human society. That beautiful passive life of divine patience is to some people as impossible to realize as the joys of heaven to those who have never heard of Christianity. Sœur Marie, without any outward sign of being better than her neighbors, was yet surrounded by an atmosphere of such sweet gentleness that the worldly stopped and wondered and passed on without unraveling the mystery.

In a few days Hoel began to show a slight degree of curiosity, and Sœur Marie was delighted, for she also had her questions to ask.

"Have I been here long? You said the other day—"

"Yes, monsieur, very long. Ah! what good French monsieur speaks. Are you really an Englishman?"

"Yes, a true-born son of perfidious Albion."

"And you have friends who must be longing to hear how you are. If you will tell me the address I will write to them."

Hoel's face became troubled; the beginning of conscious-

ness was painful. He had seemed to emerge out of a land of darkness, and he could remember nothing about it. Now the memory of Elva came back, meteor-like, with a flash, painfully and clearly.

"I have friends, sister, but none who would care to hear of me. No, I am content; let it be just as it was before. I want nothing. I was out on a holiday, and I have time to spare."

"That's strange," said Sœur Marie. "No friends who care! But there are some who will want to pray for you."

A real smile of amusement came into Hoel's face.

"Pray for me! I am sure— No, only one woman would pray for me, and she is thinking I have wronged her. No, she is trying to forget me."

"We can not forget our friends or our enemies, for we must pray for both."

Hoel answered nothing. A canting nurse seemed to him too much of a good thing; he was slightly put out for a short time, and then smiled at his own foolishness. It was not cant: to her it was religion, some deep motive power which made her the self-denying admirable nurse he found her. Was it quite fair to complain of the machinery which turned out such a useful specimen of human nature? Literature had toned down, indeed taken away, the living soul out of the body of Religion. The body remained, a lifeless figure, now and then galvanized into a show of life by the enthusiasm of some devoted disciple who mistook his own energy for the energy of religion. Was it not the same with that wonderful man, Jesse Vicary? But once tested, once brought to bear on the weak part of a man's character, was it sure to prove the prop a fundamental truth ought naturally to be?

Hoel answered himself with a shade of triumph. No! Jesse Vicary had found himself touched to the quick, and instead of the meekness supposed to be a characteristic of true Christianity the young man had revolted and had sworn revenge.

That was a test case certainly. Beautiful as were religious ethics, grand and simple as was unadulterated Christianity, it was yet nothing more than the poetic residue of man's finer parts.

Religion was a great convenience.

He contented himself by thinking these thoughts, and

then putting them away, he gave himself up to rest. Rest seemed the greatest good on earth just now. What had become of his plans and his ambitions? Gone? That was strange. He could never have imagined that his ambition would crumble like this, that he would ever feel as if power, fame, knowledge would all pass before him, and be rejected as worthless. It was all because of—

A woman!

Hoel turned restlessly on his bed, and once more gazed at Sœur Marie.

"Are you contented with your dull life, sister?" he said, suddenly. "If so you must need very little to make you happy."

"Very little? Nay, I need very much."

"Then you must be always wanting more than you have."

"Yes, always more of God's love."

Hoel smiled superciliously. "That is a language, a form of words: every class has its unreal language; we men are not exempt from it. I do not despise women; I think most highly of them, but I blame them for accepting these cut-and-dried sentences more easily than we do. Suppose I could demonstrate to you that there was nothing but this world, this sorrowful human mechanism! Where would all your phrases go?"

"I should know that I had not yet learned what God's love means. With God in our hearts no demonstration would prove Him false."

"Phrases again," said Hoel.

Sœur Marie was not angry with him, as he expected her to be, for she too smiled as she answered:

"You can not tell; you have always had yourself in your heart, no wonder you exalt poor humanity."

The unruffled Hoel for the first time in his life was injured. The calm assertion was not easy to refute. This meek-eyed sister could tell him without faltering that he was selfish.

"No," he said, decidedly, "I have had for weeks past a woman in my heart, and I am trying to dislodge her."

"She proved faithless?"

"No, you are wrong."

"She died?"

"No, she lives, and is thinking much the same of me as you say."

"Then why dislodge her?"

"Because her father— I mean there would always be a secret between us. Woman is nothing unless she is perfect in every way, unless her surroundings are as suitable as herself. You can not understand; but I tell you this to show you that I am not always taken up by myself."

It was almost pathetic to hear Hoel say this.

"Did she love you?"

"Yes, of course; but fate—God you call it—interferes strangely with one's plans."

"Yes, that is true. He prevented St. Francis Xavier from being a great preacher in Paris, and made him a poor missionary. God does interfere with our plans, but He can not change His own."

"Pshaw! look here, Sœur Marie, I was to have married a beautiful, good woman, and through no fault of mine or hers I discovered a hinderance, and instead of being happy here I am in a foreign hotel."

"If the hinderance had nothing to do with the lady herself, why did you not marry her?"

"Because it touched my honor. No, there was nothing more to be said; but can you imagine a worse interference of fate?"

"I do not understand, of course; but it seems to be that it was you who interfered with God's ways. And the poor girl—is she sorrowing?"

"Who knows?" said Hoel, angrily. "I tell you it is all a useless interference."

"You must not talk any more. I see now why you will not get well. It is the mind that is ill. And for that there is but one cure."

"What?" asked Hoel, slowly.

"The touch of Christ. He will heal it."

"No more phrases, *ma sœur*. I insist it is all pure, pure nonsense, or delusion, or—"

"It is the world that is a delusion. But come, here is your medicine. We must not talk any more. The Angelus is ringing."

"Well, we will not talk any more then; but tell me, you say I worship myself. I give you leave, Sœur Marie, to

teach me how to worship something else. Lying here so long, I am sick of myself, and of my own thoughts."

Sœur Marie shook her head.

"No, you would not learn of me. You must wait till you wish to put some one into the place of your weary thoughts. The time will come."

"That is how it is with these saintly people. They know not how to impart their poor comforts," said Hoel to himself.

Perhaps the thought of anything was too much for him, for that night he had a relapse, and again came a long, long period of illness, and new symptoms which the doctor called very unfavorable.

CHAPTER III.

NO EXPLANATION.

MARCH has some delicious days. The sap is rising into those almost unseen buds, the birds are beginning to express their joy of life, they plume themselves and flutter here and there—they love, and they build, and so express to us very plainly that love and work make happiness. The wild flowers are doing their best to herald future glories of blossoming, the lichens seem to become deeper in hue, perhaps they too hear the pulsation of life in nature, and try, low down as they are, to strive after what is grander. We seem even now to smell the "violets unborn" and the "water lilies unborn." The spring is coming; one tender sandaled foot is on the earth, and we kneel down and kiss it.

Beautiful Spring, and yet with all the joy there is such a look of sadness on thy face!

George Guthrie had been away, and suddenly he returned to Rushbrook and to the varied conversation of Mrs. Eagle Bennison on the monotonous subjects of her societies and her small gossip.

Nothing could destroy the fun that would bubble up in George Guthrie; even when Mrs. Eagle Bennison explained the shocking thing that had happened at Rushbrook, George could not look serious.

"Some people say that Elva has behaved shockingly; and I do hope, George, you, who have so much influence with her, that you will try and see if you can not make

her see how terribly unbecoming it is to throw a man over just when your wedding-day is settled. Those girls have been badly brought up. Overindulged by their father. It is a sad example to the poor."

"But, dear cousin, I can't agree with you. We are always bemoaning population; now if all our village maidens would jilt their intended husbands just before the wedding, we should have a simple solution of the difficulty."

"George, how shocking! I am sure that John would never have forgiven me if I had thrown him over, but I never should. My dear mother taught me my duty better. Elva too is so hard, she won't allow the subject to be mentioned, and goes about as if she were proud of having done this dreadful thing. Even the members of the T. A. P. S. thought it shocking."

"But the affair was mysterious. Can't you forgive Elva, dear coz, for having just given us something to talk about? You may have heard before the remark of Burnet: 'Everything must be brought to the nature of tinder and gunpowder, ready for a spark to set it on fire, before some people can be made to see anything.' Elva, I dare say, saw that Hoel Fenner had faults, so she tried him in this way. Ten to one she expects him to come back."

"But some people say that he jilted her."

"Ah! well, that changes things. I wonder you have not found out the truth."

"Indeed, I tried, but the whole family seem quite changed in character. Mrs. Kestell has resumed her bed, with a purely imaginary malady. Mr. Kestell looks years older. Pink declares he has overworked himself, and can not sleep—worried about his child, I suppose, and Amice—really, that girl is more crazy than ever. I hear such strange stories about her."

George was delighted to hear the *on dits*, though he meant to form his own opinion. At present it all seemed extraordinary.

He sauntered out to see his poor people, and heard all the gossip over again, but put in plainer words.

"Lor', sir," said old Mrs. Joyce, whom he went to see because he had made a pilgrimage to Golden Sparrow Street to bring her news of Liza, "it's been the talk of the village. Such doings we were to have at Miss Kestell's wedding, and then it all ended in smoke. But she's a fine

young woman, and it won't be long before some other man comes courting her. When did you see our 'Liza, sir?"

"About a month ago, I think. She was glad to see me, but seemed in low spirits, I thought."

"Well, sir, I'm sorry to say our 'Liza's coming home, because she's that dull she says she can't abide the place."

"That's strange. I thought 'Liza and I were always cheerful."

"That's your joking, sir. But it's true. Mr. Vicary has left, and the girl takes on so that she's coming home. We scolded her, too, but it was no use."

"Vicary left? What for?"

"Didn't you hear, sir? He's left his situation. Work was slack, and they've turned him off, and 'Liza says it's told on him wonderful. He isn't the same man."

"Has he found something else?"

"Not as 'Liza knows on; well, Mr. Vicary, albeit his people were poor folk like us, he's been a real gentleman, he has. Our 'Liza's just broken-hearted at his leaving."

"Does Mr. Kestell know? I'm sure he would get him work somewhere else. I'll just mention it to him. I've been away a long time, so I didn't know all the news."

"Well, sir, it seems natural like to see you again in these parts. It's more nor I can say for some men, as I used to say to my husband, whether you're earning a penny or not, you'd best be out-of-doors, that's the place for the men folk, and, Lor', sir! my husband he were no better than a chump of wood."

"Yes, certainly," said George, hiding a smile. "A great many men are like chumps of wood."

George went on down the hill toward Rushbrook, and mused as he went:

"Such a short time ago Elva fancied she had discovered perfection. Poor child! I have never seen her in trouble, but I don't think she threw him over. Well, well, why should I interfere? What good can a lone, lorn bachelor do? These *affaires de cœur* must be left alone. I think I had better observe 'the silence of the celebrated Franklin.'"

But just then George turned round a fir plantation, and beheld to his surprise no other than the person he was thinking of—Elva Kestell was walking side by side with Walter Akister. George paused, a curious sensation came

over him, and then he quietly retraced his steps, and taking another silver-sanded path leading to Mr. Kestell's house, he reached the first Pool, now beginning to put on a spring-like green garment.

Here he paused. Elva must pass by before she went in, and George Guthrie meant to wait for her.

Walter Akister had been silent long enough—that was his own opinion. He had left Boulogne (after courageously saving his enemy from the water), with the firm intention of wooing Elva again. He had not paused to inquire whether Hoel had friends, or whether he was hurt. He knew he lived, and that he had saved him. Walter would have saved a drowning dog with just as much feeling as he had shown for Hoel Fenner; he despised him too much to question him further. His sister Betta had told him that Mr. Fenner had jilted Elva, Amice had told her or had let it out when Betta had wondered at Elva's conduct. That letter had brought Walter home, and yet, often meeting Elva, till now he had not dared to say anything. It was not that she showed any signs of sorrow; on the contrary, she went about as usual alone on the moors; she had even gone to a dinner-party with her father, but her mother's illness had prevented much greater stir.

Walter, in search of his ideal, had yet hesitated because he saw that she was a different Elva to the woman he had seen at the railway accident.

It is better to disbelieve in a sudden change of character, because, except in rare cases, everything changes sooner than a man or woman's character. But those who carefully watched Elva Kestell felt the alteration in her, most of all her father. She was more loving, more attentive to him, if possible, but she was not the same.

Amice too saw it, and it affected her powerfully; night after night she had paced up and down her room thinking that the result was her fault, and that she had ruined her sister's life. If so, she must find a way to bring back her happiness.

As to Mrs. Kestell, she took to her bed from the sheer dread of Mrs. Fitzgerald coming down to hear all about "poor Elva's engagement." Mrs. Kestell had gloried in having got the better of her sister, and now the tables were turned. She visited her disappointment and dullness upon her husband, and yet she had not been told the truth; Mr.

Kestell had invented a long story to account for the unaccountable breaking off.

Certainly Elva was changed. She had drunk so deeply of the cup of bitterness that now the taste was always in her mouth. She had waited so patiently at first that all her patience was gone. It had turned into gall. She rose up after the blow, and determined not to be beaten down as another girl might be, and the result was a hardness which would not be hidden, a pride which scoffed at sympathy, even sympathy from Amice.

She took to walking miles along the great lonely road that runs through the seemingly endless forest land; she watched the early cobwebs melt in the dews of morning, and saw them again spread out to receive the minute diamonds; she noted the squirrels climb the red stems and scamper away to their warm shelters, and she hated Nature and Nature's beauty. So at last she stopped in-doors, and read, and read. Books were said to be friends, and she appealed to them, but instead of the printed words she saw: "Hoel left me and never told me why; he never answered my letter. It was cruel, cruel, and I hate him."

These words were seen over and over again, and were maddening, so she shut up the books, and wandered by the Pools. That beautiful sheltered walk full of exquisite thought and poetry and beauty had one fault. It had the power of calling up the remembrance of him. In all the fullness of her young love she had walked there with Hoel, so she turned away, and fled to the open moorland again, and chose little walks he had never discovered, and places he had never seen. Here it was that one day Walter Akister joined her, and she did not repel him.

She knew she was wrong; she hated herself for allowing his silent sympathy; she said to herself too that Walter knew her heart was given away, and could not be his; but she let him wander with her and now and then offer her a hand over a stile, or talk on about the news in the paper, or tell her what his father had last seen; even gradually he made her come to The Observatory and see Betta—Betta who had had her instructions beforehand, and shyly tried to follow them out.

When a human being is crushed by the unfaith of a loved one, Tennyson tells us, it works like madness in the

brain. In after-years Elva saw she was mad during these days, and yet outwardly she looked calm and self-possessed.

In spite of all this hardness every morning her first waking thought was:

"Will he write to-day and explain? Oh, Hoel, Hoel, I loved you so much!"

Each day brought no answer, and at last sullenly Elva accepted the final silence, accepted it at the same time that she inwardly rebelled and outwardly grew calmer, and her voice now and then sounded as of old, only something was gone out of it.

"For papa's sake I will keep up. I will not give way. I will not show my feelings. He suffers for me. Papa, papa, I do love you; your love at least is sure."

The day that George Guthrie saw Walter and Elva was the first day in which Walter Akister dared to say even a word of love. He was a man who would rather have his hand cut off than let go something he intended to seize. He meant to have Elva, and nothing would prevent him. The passionate temper has a power over others as well as being a curse unto itself.

"Spring has come early this year," he said, when it was time to go homeward. "I never saw things so forward." He looked at Elva sideways, and saw the line of pain hovering round her smile.

"I did not know you kept a chronicle of the first primrose, the first cuckoo, and the first swallow," she said, scornfully.

"Didn't you? I suppose you never much cared to know what I did do. Any way, Elva, I have recorded in a special diary every time I have met you for the last five years," he said, suddenly.

Elva flushed crimson. Had it come to *this?* Was he saying this to the woman who would have been Hoel's wife now it—if he had not forsaken her? Ah, well! Hoel had known her only a short time, and had won her love merely to cast it away again.

"You might have noted something more useful. When are you going back to town?"

"When—when you are my wife, Elva."

Elva stopped still now.

"How dare you say such a thing, Walter? Did I not tell you before that I never would be?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you dare to—"

"Because since then Hoel Fenner has changed his mind. I never change mine."

Elva shuddered. The words might have touched many women in a way they touched her; but she also seemed to recoil from this man.

"Who told you Hoel Fenner had changed his mind?" she said, trying to be haughty.

"I know it."

"And the reason?" Elva spoke superciliously, as if she disbelieved every word, and yet, in truth, she longed to know what Walter knew.

"Yes."

"Then you will tell me?" still very scornfully.

"Yes, he was afraid of having to make too many sacrifices for a wife."

Was that the truth? No, no; it was not that. But what was it? she said to herself.

"It's not true—not true!" cried Elva, dropping her tone of scorn, and her eyes flashed out some of the passion of her soul. "Walter, you have no right to say this. I will not hear it!" and without waiting to hear more from him, she walked away so hastily that Walter did not even attempt to catch her up.

He looked after her with a fierce, angry look on his dark face; all the concentrated hatred of his rival seemed to be expressed on his features. If envy, hatred, and malice are human propensities, then at this moment Walter Akister did not deny poor humanity.

"She loves him still, after his conduct—his dastardly refusal to marry her. But what do I care? A man who has acted as this man can never return, he can never show his face again. Let her love him, but she shall be my wife."

He did not attempt to follow Elva; on the contrary, he turned once more up the hill and went home. His home was dull in spite of his devoted sister. Betta was good and kind, but she was oppressed by her men folk, and she had not enough courage to rise above her troubles and her dull life.

As for Elva, she walked on and on quickly, breathlessly, thinking.

"Even Walter knows it; they all know it; they know that he left me, and they do not know the reason. Oh, God! if only I knew it. Now I never shall—never—"

Elva had left Walter feeling very angry, but before she was in sight of the bridge her anger had calmed down; once more there stole over her the terrible cloud of despondency against which it was so hard to struggle.

Suddenly she remembered she must put on her usual manner, for there was George Guthrie leaning over the parapet, evidently studying the lights and shades on the water. Elva was angry that she was thus forced from proper pride to appear careless and happy. It was almost worse before an old friend who knew her—and him—so well than before strangers.

"There you are, Elva. You came like a ghost. I have been waiting for you. Have you had a nice walk?"

Elva paused; positively she was unable to answer in the usual bantering tone George at once assumed.

"No, not nice; I was with Walter Akister."

"Ah, I thought I saw you." George now and then stretched the truth.

There was a pause, and Elva came and leaned beside him against the bridge. Her face was pale, except for two bright spots of color, her hands were thinner and very transparent; one saw a haggard look in them which is a very tell-tale sign of deep mental feeling. George broke the pause; he suffered for his friend with that deep, sympathetic feeling which lay beneath his genial fun and chaff.

"I am sorry, Elva, for—for all that has happened." He thought it better to break the ice at once; it was impossible to ignore facts when they knew each other so well, but Elva was up in arms at once.

"Sorry! Why should you be?" Then she laughed a little. "We thought we knew each other's ways and minds, but like many other people we found we had made a mistake."

"I can't understand it. Don't frown, Elva. May I say at once that it is a mystery to me? Tell me, can I go to him and see if—"

How Elva longed to grasp this friendly hand, and to say: "Go; it is a mystery to me too; go and find out!" But pride was too strong.

"Thank you, George; such things are quite beyond the

power of a third person. You can't mend china cups, can you? and it is a third person who puts in rivets, and very ugly they look. Besides, after a time they come apart again."

"You were never bitter before," said George, deeply pained.

"No, I never was; I am changed, I think. I can't help it. Whatever I do now will be done by a third person. Oh, George, life is so miserable now, and, just think, only so short a time ago it was so happy, so very happy!"

"Let me do something."

"What can you do? Even if you could, I would not let you go to him; but you can not, no one knows where he is. Then papa is ill; that is almost a comfort—he leans on me, and could not spare me. All this has tried him. George, papa has the tenderest heart of any man I ever knew. He just prevents me from disbelieving in mankind altogether—he and you!"

"Upon my word, Elva, there's some mystery in all this. Will you trust me? all the poor people do; why shouldn't you? Well, honestly, Elva, do you know of any reason why Hoel Fenner, a gentleman, if ever there was one, should have done this? I know you did not."

Elva covered her face. Pride fled before this true-hearted sympathy.

"Honestly, George, there is no reason, not one. You know originally he fancied I had too much money, but I soon showed him that was pure nonsense. Then his uncle died, and left him nothing: but Hoel never expected to be his heir. There is no reason except that he got tired of me, or—or—I don't know. If only I did— But there, it's no use talking about it," she said, with her strong will forcing back the useless tide of regret and disappointed love. "George, you are the first, the only person, I have spoken to like this. Promise me you will forget it. Tell no one. I have always trusted you, let me trust you at least. Come in and see papa, it will cheer him up."

They walked over the bridge together, and before opening the swing-gate, George Guthrie paused again.

"Elva, may I say something? We are old friends."

"Yes."

"Don't judge Hoel Fenner yet. There must be a rea-

son, the man is not mad. I will go and find him. In these days nobody is lost."

"No, no, George. I wrote and he did not answer. It is kinder to forget—entirely to forget. Promise me that you will never mention this subject again."

George Guthrie wanted to say: "Don't let Walter Akister make you untrue to yourself," but he dared not. When anything did stir the depth of his feeling, George Guthrie was as weak as a woman.

"I promise nothing about myself, Elva, but of course I shall respect your wishes. You will always let me be your friend."

She gave him her hand, and George Guthrie felt at this moment the full beauty of friendship; but his was a rare case, and such Platonic friendship has few examples on earth.

When they entered Rushbrook Hall, George Guthrie registered a vow that whatever the mystery of Hoel Fenner might be, he would discover it. He reserved judgment, though pretty sure in his own mind that it was Hoel's fault somewhere—somehow—

"The man's a coxcomb. Has ideas that Elva will be too expensive a luxury. Ten to one he did expect that uncle's money, and threw up the whole thing when the old man died. Still, it was dastardly conduct, and Hoel Fenner's a gentleman of honor. No, George Guthrie, that puzzle doesn't fit. Try something else."

Elva opened the study door.

"Papa," she called. George admired the bright tone she forced into her voice. "Here's George come back."

George saw that Mr. Kestell was writing at his table; he saw him look up quickly and almost suspiciously; he saw that for half a moment he stared at the visitor as if he did not recognize him, and then the recognition came quickly and the curious looks fled.

"George Guthrie—come in, my dear fellow. I'm very glad to see you."

George came in, and then a strange feeling came over him as he thought: "Old Kestell has been much tried by all this. He is changed—very much changed."

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS.

It was that same evening that the spring weather which had come too soon seemed to hurry away again as if afraid of the reception it might meet with. Winter returned, loath to leave Rushbrook valley, and once more the wind swept over the forest land, and snapped off the boughs of trees by the Pools, and ruffled the deep water, and sent little eddies over their inky blackness.

It was late in quiet Rushbrook, and all the household had retired to rest from the dwelling-rooms. Even the master of the house had been persuaded by Elva not to sit up this evening, because Mr. Pink had said he must "court sleep by early devotion to that mistress."

But there was one person who did not sleep, who did not even court sleep. Amice Kestell had been kneeling for an hour in prayer; she was more and more accustomed now to live away from Elva and her father, because Mrs. Kestell required so much nursing, or rather individual attention, that she was seldom out of the sick-room. Had she not been willing to do this, Symee's strength would have been worn out, and Symee herself looked so pale and miserable that it was a wonder she kept up.

Amice was one of those whose lives can not be understood by the ordinary man and woman. She had been going through a period of acute mental suffering, and yet she had appealed to no one for sympathy or help, but night after night she spent much time in prayer.

Ever since the day that she had met Hoel Fenner in the wood, Amice fancied she had done wrong. She said to herself that she ought to have forced Hoel to explain himself, she ought to have told him that whatever he did, whatever he thought, Elva was not to be made to suffer; in fact, she ought to have insisted on hearing all he knew. Mingled with this self-reproach was a stronger feeling that the curse had fallen, that now, whatever the sin of her father might be—and in Amice's mind it was clear that some mystery enveloped them—now was the time for her to sacrifice herself for Elva.

Why was Elva to suffer when she, Amice, was ready to

offer herself? And on her knees the girl, full of the spirit of the early martyrs, prayed to bear the punishment. She could not unravel the story of the sin, but she fancied she knew that it related to gold. Had she not always had that shrinking from it? Was she not sure in some way that (if she could only find out the clew) "John Pellew" was the man who had been wronged—wronged by her father?

"The sin has found us out in Hoel Fenner; but why should Elva suffer when I am ready? Take me, take me, oh, Lord! I care nothing for the gold, only for their happiness!"

Sometimes, as the girl prayed, one of these strange periods of acute sensation would come on, and full of horror at some unknown, intangible something, she felt as if she must rush away out of the house into the darkness. It was the same feeling that takes possession of human beings when they feel the earth shake, and all power of thought, except the thought of flight, seems to forsake them.

This evening the storm of wind that raged without increased the feeling of horror, and suddenly starting up, the girl, pale as death, seized a white shawl, and wrapping it around her, made some steps toward the door. Then she paused, and, changing her mind, she went and listened at Elva's door. She bent her head and held her breath, but all was silent. Elva was sleeping.

"No, no; it is not here. She sleeps. Oh, God, she sleeps! Where am I to go? Some one wants me!"

Again she crossed the room, and very silently opened the door into the passage. Here all was darkness and stillness, except for the sound of wind. No human footstep or voice could be heard.

Amice needed no light, she had always had a wonderful knack of finding her way in the dark. "Some one wants me," she repeated to herself.

She came to her father's door, and hurried past it, shivering, then a light broke in upon her overwrought brain.

"It is Symee," she said, half disappointed. "Symee, of course." She had fancied the clew was about to be discovered.

Then she walked up to the girl's room, and opened it without pausing.

"Symee, you ought to be in bed. What is the matter?" for Symee was kneeling by her bed, sobbing as if her heart would break. She started up.

"Oh, Miss Amice, why have you come? I am so miserable, so wretched! There never was any one so wretched in all the world! It is all my fault, my own fault!"

"What is it, Symee?" Amice noticed a crumpled letter in the girl's hand.

"It is from Jesse, Miss Amice. He told me not to tell any one here: but I must—I must tell you. He has been out of work for some time now, and he can't get any more. I have begged him to let me tell Mr. Kestell, but he won't. He writes such dreadful things; he says he would rather starve than accept a penny of his money. He refused to emigrate, and now, when I write about it— Oh, Miss Amice, my heart will break, and I feel as if it were my fault!"

"Out of work? How is that? Did he leave the office? Why did you not tell me before?"

"No, they gave him notice. Business was slack. Mr. Kestell could get him another situation, but I dare not ask him; he would say Jesse refused the farm in Canada. I can't bear to think that perhaps he is wanting food."

"You must go to him, Symee. I can't understand. Papa used to say—" Amice paused; a flash of light seemed to tell her the truth. Her father had wanted Jesse to emigrate, and on his refusal he had been dismissed from Card & Lilley's. No, that would be too dreadful; it could not be true. She herself was wicked for supposing such a thing.

"Go to him? How can I, Miss Amice? I would go if I dared; but how can I? Mr. Kestell will not let me. I can not be spared—no, no. I refused before, and now—and yet Jesse will starve! I have a little money saved; if I were there he would not know that I spent my money. Now he will not touch it. Oh, Jesse, Jesse!"

"You must go to him to-morrow, Symee. Never mind about money. I have enough for you both. I can borrow it if necessary. As to being spared, now mamma does not get up, I can do all that is necessary; besides, we are rich enough to get nurses. No, you must go to-morrow, and I will go with you. During that time my sister will stay at home. Don't cry, Symee; all will yet be well."

"How can I go? You do not know. Besides, Jesse has taken a room at some cheaper place. He is no longer in his old lodgings. He will say it is not a fit place for me. Oh, Jesse! What can I do? I dare not go, Miss Amice. With one word he could have the farm. Mr. Kestell told me to tell him so several weeks ago, but I do not know what has come to Jesse. He is changed, quite changed! It is dreadful!"

Amice laid a cool hand on the girl's burning forehead.

"Hush!" she said. "Hush! Don't you know, Symee, that we can not go on when God bars the way? we do but struggle uselessly. Do you see that now, even though the path is thorny, God shows you how you may walk in it? You refused it when it was less rough, and now— Oh, if we could only just let Him take our lives in His hands, we should never be sad—never! It is our restless striving to shape our own lives that brings us sorrow. He never gives us any sorrow that makes us unhappy. Come, Symee, do not cry, but just trust Him."

The soft tones, the soothing words, seemed to have a healing effect. Symee got up, and the tears slowly ceased.

"Will you really come with me? And what will Mr. Kestell say?" Symee had very little courage.

"I will tell him, Symee; just do as I think best. You must go to-morrow. You have delayed too long already."

And after that Symee slept; there seemed such strength in Miss Amice's words; when she said something it had to be done. To-morrow she would go! How she would get away she knew not, but it would be done.

Amice felt strong now. Up till now she had trembled before her father, but she was getting over her fear. It was Elva's sorrow that had made her brave. All day long she said to herself:

"Somehow I must expiate that unknown wrong done to an unknown person."

Just as the carriage had come round to the door for the master of Rushbrook, Amice walked into the study.

"Papa," she said, calmly, yet with her blue eyes bent on the ground, "papa, I am going to take Symee to London to-day."

Mr. Kestell was folding some papers, and putting them into a large pocket-book.

"Symee to London? What for?"

"She is going to her brother. He is in trouble." Amice looked up, and though her voice was calm, she grasped the back of a chair to still her trembling. Her father walked away and opened a drawer so that she could not see his face. She noted, however, that he stooped more; the gray hair had become whiter. Elva would often call it his venerable love-locks, but Amice never joked her father.

"Has your mother said she could spare Symee for the day, dear?" His voice was almost tender.

"No, papa, it is not for the day. It is for good. Symee must go. We have kept her here too long. She ought to go to her only relation now he is in trouble. How can she learn to be a good woman if we crush out her natural affection? Shall I bring back a nurse from London?"

Again a slight pause, and still Mr. Kestell kept his back turned; then suddenly a terrible trembling seemed to possess him. He rose up to his full height, and turned upon his child with the wrath which is so overwhelming to the young—the wrath of the aged.

His voice shook, but was not raised much, and his hand seemed to be trembling from very strong emotion.

Amice turned cold as her father approached her; she seemed frozen with fear.

"Amice, how dare you do this—this thing? How dare you take upon yourself to interefere in my house, with my affairs? What right have you to thrust yourself continually between me and what I consider to be justice? I forbid you to take Symee away—do you hear, I forbid it! If Vicary is suffering, it is from his own obstinate folly, his own confounded pride. He has had the offer of a first-rate position in Canada, and he has refused it; now let him learn what it is to want work. I am in a hurry, Amice. Let me hear nothing more of this!"

A dreadful feeling of dizziness passed over Amice. Never had she seen her father like this. She longed for Elva's presence; but she would not give way.

"I am very sorry you are angry with me, papa, but tell me if Jesse Vicary lost his work because—because he refused your offer of the Canadian farm?"

That truth is stranger than fiction is a very trite remark; but its very triteness shows how terrible may be its truth. At this moment Mr. Kestell's trembling hand seemed un-

consciously to raise itself as if he would seize Amice and shake the life out of her. A lurid light flashed in his eyes, followed by a look of hatred, most awful in the eyes of any human being, but far more awful in those of a father toward his child; and all the time Amice never lowered her eyes, but gazed horror-struck and speechless at the sight before her.

She understood, and her father saw she did so, even before, with almost superhuman power, he let fall his hand upon the table. The hand was now powerless; it could not now have shaken a mere child.

"Go!" he said, faintly. "You know, or you might know, if you had any heart, that these—these scenes are most distressing to me, most injurious; I command you to leave me!"

Amice's lips moved, but her power of utterance seemed gone. Her tender heart was breaking.

"Go!" he repeated. "You are a cruel, unnatural child! If I were to—"

"Papa, papa, don't!" cried Amice, finding speech under the terrible expectancy of a father's curse. "Don't you know that I—I must do it? Don't you at least understand that if—if it would take *it* away, you might kill me? I would only be, oh, so glad! But we must not keep Symee, we must not—don't let us have that upon our conscience—that as well as—"

Mr. Kestell felt as if something had overtaken him; he was not himself—the venerable, venerated Kestell of Greystone, standing in his luxurious study, talking to his gentle Amice; but he was out upon a bleak, stony land, a storm, such as he had never before experienced, was raging around him; the lightning flashed across the sky, and showed him every object—no, every action of his life for years past, with terrible plainness. Only one had not yet been revealed to him, and he was about to see that. How unnatural his voice sounded!

"As well as what, Amice? Pray speak out; I hate these foolish mysteries!"

"As well as—John Pellew."

Mr. Kestell breathed a deep sigh of relief. The lightning had flashed across the sky, and had not revealed the object he dreaded to see. He laughed now, and the laugh

sounded worse in his daughter's ears than his words of anger.

"John Pellew! What do you mean? Ah! I suppose that scoundrel Fenner told you of his relationship with him. Unfortunately for me, I knew the poor fellow, and had to pay his debts as best I could after he left the country. It was fortunate for his family that he died before he plunged back into dissipation."

"The carriage is waiting, sir," said Jones, opening the door, and as if he had been a prisoner in his own study, Mr. Kestell immediatly followed the butler out of the room, leaving Amice standing alone. There came a distant call in Elva's voice:

"Papa, papa, don't forget to take your plaid;" and in another moment his eldest daughter ran into the hall, and passed her arm into that of her father.

"You naughty, dreadful dad! why, I told you at breakfast that you were not to forget it, and now you have. I must go and fetch it out of your study."

"No, no, darling; I prefer this rug. Jones, put it into the carriage. Why, you look more like your old self, dear! Don't leave your mother to-day. I shall be back early, most likely for luncheon."

"Shall you? I am glad. Why, this morning you said you were coming home late. You are using the liberty granted only to ladies, sir."

Mr. Kestell smiled and kissed Elva, then hastily entered his carriage.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER SON-IN-LAW.

When the carriage had gone about a mile toward Greystone, Mr. Kestell pulled the string, and said he would get down.

"Hunter, just drive on, and leave this note at the office. I think I shall walk home. I am not very well."

"Shall I drive you back first, sir?"

"Oh, no! a little air will do me good. The air is fresh after the storm."

"Yes, sir: it was a very sudden storm. They prophesied it in the papers for to-day, but, like everything as come from 'Merica, it's more showy than certain. 'Merica's

the curse of the age, sir, with its cheap machinery and its confounded weed, not to mention its storms, sir."

Mr. Kestell smiled, nodded his head; the footman shut the door, got up on to the box, and the carriage drove off.

The coachman was an old and valued servant, and was a privileged person.

"The old gentleman seems very different from what he used to be," he remarked. "So undecided. He used to take such a pride in his word. To my mind, it comes of seeing a doctor so often. When my missus wants to send for Pink, I says to her: 'Don't 'ee do so, missus; there's more of the Old Gentleman in doctors than there is in lawyers, excepting the master, Tom, for he's one of the best and nicest gentlemen you can have to do with.'"

Mr. Kestell walked slowly back along the road, then, as if afraid he might meet some one (though not many persons were to be met hereabout), he turned off into a path which led to higher lands, and from whence, making a circuit, he could descend into the road by the Pools.

It was a day that looked like autumn, perhaps because of the rain which had fallen in the night. There was a slight haze over everything, softening the shadows and sunshine of spring. By and by, when this was dispersed, it would be hot. The bare trees were beautiful in their delicate outline, and did not look sad or dreary among the firs. Winter never really looked sad at Rushbrook, because of its evergreen woods, and its rich carpet of heather. The robins were chirping with undisguised cheerfulness, there was a thrush seeking for building material by the last Pool, when Mr. Kestell stepped on to the road.

Spring that so often stirs the young blood to build beautiful castles in the air, and which to the old brings a dreamy, happy foretaste of the heavenly rest and beauty, only made this man inexpressibly sad, as he paused by the tangled hedge, where the dog-mercury shot upward from the moist bank, and the speedwell peeped out with its blue eye, like the first herald of summer flowers.

Heaven defend the old from sorrowful back-looking; such are the avenues of Remorse, though Repentance stands by the way-side.

Mr. Kestell walked over the grassy path which separated the two highest Pools that were furthest away from Rushbrook. There had been an old lock here, in times gone

by, by which these two pools had been able to be drained, the one into the other: now the communication was cut off, and the old wood-work remained.

Mr. Kestell leaned against it, and gazed down in the water. It was very deep, so deep that here and there the surface looked inky black. How calm and peaceful it was! it seemed to comfort and quiet the still shaken nerves, set vibrating by the morning's passionate feelings, for anger, like a pendulum, returns from whence it started. He who gives it its impetus will himself feel the rebound.

If Amice had suffered, Mr. Kestell had endured agony. Now he was, as was often the case, arguing with himself.

"What a fool I was to be so easily roused—fool, fool! Did I not resolve only the other day that nothing should again take me off my guard? Strange that philosophy can not be more easily learned! '*Les malheurs des malheurs sont ceux qui n'arrivent jamais,*' some Frenchman said, and he embodied in the words a tremendous truth. I have gone through a critical period, but it is over now; nothing really remains that can bring up the past with certainty. Vicary will have enough to do with finding his own subsistence; I can't pity him; he was blind to his own interest. Why does he mistake his own good fortune? What will he gain by struggling with an imaginary wrong? He can not know—and he imagines wild theories. Why waste his life, his youth? Poor fool! he will think differently when he comes to be old. Old—yes, I am getting old! Ah! how seldom one likes to acknowledge that old age has come! Some one says: 'Let not a man desire life! Let him not desire death!' Does any man really desire death?"

Mr. Kestell moved slightly, and looked further down into the black water.

"Does he? What will death do for man? Will it bury his secrets forever, or will he be beyond the reach of discovery? Ah! who knows whether death will bring oblivion? Shall we see our private thoughts, our secrets, handled ruthlessly by the living, and yet not be able to interpose one word, not give one explanation to soften down their estimate of us? Poor people! many of the living are stupid; they can not clearly trace the minute steps which bring a man to unfortunate results, and yet perhaps more often than not, indeed, the original mistake has been so slight, so pardonable, as to be a mere nothing compared

with the result. But why trouble one's self about the future? The present only is sure—the present: there is yet time, and time is everything. Sound sleep is like death. The brain is stilled then—stilled! Doctor Pierquin saw the vermicular motion during a dreamy period, and saw that in sound sleep the brain is quiescent. Death must therefore be devoid of thought—it is with matter in motion that we think, stillness is without ideas. How strangely calm the water is to-day—all thought at rest upon it! One might say not a ruffle—not a movement. Ah! what was that?"

The strange stillness was broken by a step through the brushwood behind him. Mr. Kestell did not stir; he did not even look round, till a voice called out:

"Mr. Kestell! It isn't often one can find the man one wants. This is luck."

It was Walter Akister.

There was a look of supreme content over his usually dark and morose features.

Mr. Kestell let go his hold of the wooden beam, and held out his hand to the young man.

"You must wonder at my unusual presence here; I can not remember when I gave myself the pleasure of a morning stroll."

Walter cared nothing about Mr. Kestell's walks, he was too full of his own concerns.

"I am very glad, anyhow, that you are here, Mr. Kestell. I was wondering when I could see you to-day, but I would much rather see you out here. I want to speak to you about—"

"About Elva?" said Mr. Kestell, hastily, seeing Akister paused. The old man was quite himself again, and the kindly look returned to his eyes. "My dear fellow, I think I can guess your meaning. Indeed, yours has been a very faithful affection, very unlike—"

"Don't mention that scoundrel; I do not wish to be a murderer, but I was sorely tempted to leave him to his fate on Christmas-day. He is gone—gone for good—and I am heartily glad of it. If I have your leave, sir, I hope in time that Elva—"

Mr. Kestell eagerly grasped Walter's hand.

"Your father is a very old friend, Walter, and we have known you for years; I would not force my children's in-

clination, but if Elva could forget that short, sad, unaccountable episode, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see her your wife."

"If she can forget," said Walter, gloomily. "That is the question. You should have forced an explanation from him, sir; he should have been horsewhipped."

Evidently the savage tone grated on the old man, for he said, very gently:

"At my age, Akister, one has to restrain one's natural impulses; besides, Fenner never gave me the chance. I have made careful inquiries, and I can hear nothing of him. He went abroad and left no address."

"And Elva does not know?"

"She is entirely ignorant—"

And Walter kept his own counsel.

"May I tell Elva it is your wish?"

"By all means. Nay, more, I will tell her so myself, Akister; I will do everything to forward your wishes. Elva is young; my greatest happiness will be to see her get over this sad trouble."

Walter shook the hand held out to him, and without further conversation he turned away and plunged again into the upland forest and disappeared.

"It must be soon," said Mr. Kestell to himself, "very soon; in that case, all might be well. Poor child, it will be better for her in the future. Walter is not the man to care for anything but her. If Fenner had been like that —ah!"

Then he fell to musing again about Elva, till, though it was by no means hot, beads of perspiration stood on his brow, and it was painful to see the way in which the nerves started forward, and had the appearance of being knotted and swollen.

"Such a small thing, such a small thing!" he said, looking once more at the black water. "If I had to begin again, should I do otherwise? They can see my account-books and judge for themselves. I have spent the whole, and more than the whole, on them. And now they are ungrateful."

He did not know how long he stayed here, only he guessed by the way the mist had all cleared away, and the sun had come forth in all its brilliancy that it was getting on toward the early lunch-time. He would not look at his

watch, having a faint idea of saying that he did not know the time, and this care to keep to the literal truth made him smile at himself.

"One can not be too particular," he said, aloud, and with these almost puerile thoughts he walked home along the road by the Pools. On the bridge he saw Elva; she was looking out toward the high-road, and did not see him till he called her:

"Elva! Well, darling?"

Elva's face lighted up with a smile, a smile she only gave to him now.

"Papa, how did you come here? Why, you will be in time for lunch! That is nice, for I am all alone."

"What is the time, dear? I never looked at my watch. How is your mother?"

"Why, that is just it, papa, she is fast asleep now, and Ellen is with her. I came to see if Amice had sent a telegram. I told her to let me know if a nurse were coming."

What! That again? Must he always have everything against him?

"A nurse? What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know, papa, Amice has taken Symee away to her brother, and how we are to manage I don't know, I am sure. Amice said you knew all about it."

"I—I knew?" he stammered. How much did Elva know?

"Yes; have you forgotten? She told you, Amice said so, and she is so particular."

"Well," Mr. Kestell spoke dreamily, and Elva looked at him anxiously. Lately her father had seemed sometimes not to understand quickly what was said.

"It seems Vicary is in trouble, and Symee feels she must go. She cried very much, poor girl; but it is better, of course, to be on the safe side. One would be sorry if she were unhappy here."

Mr. Kestell waved his hand slightly, as if the subject were of no importance.

"Elva, I have just met Walter Akister."

Elva blushed painfully.

"Did he speak to you, too, papa?"

"Yes, to me, too, darling."

"But you said nothing?"

"I said it was the dearest wish of my life, and, darling, I have—I may have very few more years to live."

"How can you speak so? No, no, love is not for me; it can not be, after—what has taken place."

"My poor child! but do not fancy that a young heart can never recover. Sad and terrible as was the ordeal, surely you can not think of him now in any light but one that is unfavorable."

"Papa, don't speak of it! Sometimes I feel as if I must hate, as if I do hate him. But then at other times all the old feeling comes back. Papa, papa!"

The flood-gate of reserve was open, and Elva gave way.

"Hush, darling," he said, in a voice of infinite tenderness. "This distresses me extremely."

Elva tried to quiet herself, but failed.

"It is a living death. I would do anything—anything to get out of it; if I only knew—if I had some reason, I would not mind then, papa; indeed, I would try and bear it. I do now, I have been brave, I have tried new occupations, new interests, and all of it is like dust in my mouth. It all revolts me. I want only to know, just to know. Papa, you have had such a happy life, you have always had the one you loved near you, you can not tell what it is. It is like a great madness coming down upon me. I go about saying the same thing over and over again: 'Let me know—never mind what the reason may be—let me know it!'"

"Hush, hush, darling!" he said, and leaning against the bridge he put his trembling arm round her. "Don't say that, it may be that—that if you knew, if we knew, you might wish your present ignorance back again. Try some other remedy; try, Elva, for my sake, to love the man who has loved you so long and so faithfully."

"Papa, papa, do you wish it? No—no, I can not!"

"My child, do you know—no, you can not know—how much I suffer, and have suffered for you? If I could clear this up, good God, I would, you know it! But as it must remain a mystery, will it not be a great comfort to me to see you the wife of a man who loves you devotedly? How can I die and feel that the child who is so dear to me has no one to turn to for comfort, no one to—"

"Please don't speak like that, papa. You will live a long time, and I shall at least feel that if I have lost his

love, I have been able to give you more, if that is possible."

Mr. Kestell shook his head.

"I feel that any day I may be—that something may happen to me; indeed, Elva, this terrible uncertainty about you may hasten the result. To know you happily married would—yes, I feel sure would add years to my life."

"Papa!"

"Yes, darling. I do not suppose it even. I am sure of it. Your troubles are undermining my health, my peace of mind."

Elva drew a long breath. How terrible of her father to put it thus. He could not know, he could not understand what he was asking of her!

"But, papa, I do not love him. How can I promise to do so? Besides—" and in her heart she cried out: "Heel, Heel, only tell me, and then I could judge whether it were wicked of me, even for my father's sake, to think of such a thing!"

"No, dearest; yours is a true, noble nature. I do not expect you to change easily: but when love is gone there are many softer feelings which, on the whole—who knows? —may make us happier than passionate love. It is not a love-marriage that is always the happiest."

"But yours, papa—look at that!"

There was a slight contraction of the muscles about his mouth.

"Mine has been no common love, certainly."

"I want to be like you—and Walter, papa, he is so easily made angry. I am sure we could never agree."

"He loves you, dear: think of that. Will not that counterbalance some few infirmities of nature? Are there many men who would come forward as he has done, and, careless of what is said, at once declare that he loves you, and will marry you now at once?"

Elva drew herself up proudly.

"Whatever people say, papa, about us, about me and you, is pure gossip; at least Kestell of Greystone's daughter has nothing to be ashamed of, except for others."

"Yes, for others. But, dearest, about Walter—will you not listen to my pleading for him?"

"For yourself, papa. It will be for you—if I do it.

Only if, if—and yet how can I? If I do, you must teach me to hate him—Hoel—always. Not now and then, but always. As the wife of another, how can I have that other feeling?"

"As the wife of another, Kestell of Greystone's daughter will do her duty," he said, proudly; then suddenly a faint blush covered his face.

"Will you think of it, dear—for my sake?"

There was a long pause, and a terrible struggle went on in Elva's heart. At last she cried:

"For your sake, papa—I love you so very much!"

"And you will do this for me?"

There came the clanging sound of a gong across the bridge, and both stood upright.

"For you?" Elva felt like a hunted animal. She had fancied herself so safe, taking care of her father, and now he himself was pleading so earnestly against himself.

"If you were Walter's wife, you would live here. Yes, child, at Rushbrook: we need then never part—till death!"

"I can not decide now," she said, almost angrily.

"Then to-night—to-night, my darling, give me your answer. Believe me—your father—when I say that that other love is dead—dead! It can never return, and this one is a true affection. I know it is a true love; no obstacle will deter Walter Akister. I can understand that sort of love; the other was very different."

"Yes, yes!" said Elva to herself. "Oh, so different! He was my love, he might have had faults, but he was noble, and great, and brave, and gentle—Hoel, Hoel!"

Aloud, she could only whisper:

"I can not promise anything, but I will tell you my answer to-night."

Amice was gone. Mr. Kestell slowly took that in, and she had carried off Symee. What would his wife say? He hardly dared ask this question, and feared to go upstairs.

"I will have lunch first with you, dearest," he said to Elva, and Elva, forcing herself to eat something, tried not to show any feeling before the servants. Yet there was a strange hush everywhere. This was at last broken by the arrival of a fly containing a trained nurse, a pretty bright young woman.

"Go and introduce her to your mother, Elva," said Mr. Kestell. Elva, glad to get away, did so.

After a little time the old man nerved himself to follow, and, to his surprise, saw a brighter look on his wife's face.

"My dear Josiah, what a comfort to have a pleasanter face about me! Symee has given me the blues lately. This Hodson is quite a relief."

So, after all his scheming to keep Symee, he discovered she was not regretted. When Amice came back she found no one spoke a word about her absence, except Elva, who clung to her.

"Amice, my own sister, when you hear something do not think badly of me. It is for papa's sake."

Amice did not understand; her mind was full of what she had seen in town. That evening Elva said, as her father's arm was round her:

"Papa, for your sake I will—for your sake! But tell him yourself. I can not!"

CHAPTER VI.

SYMEE'S RECEPTION.

AMICE was very strong in her determination when once her mind was made up. It was almost impossible to turn her from her plans, and the strange power this gave her was out of all proportion to her gentle appearance. If it could be tabulated, we should find that the chief rulers of the world were quiet, determined people, who among those who do not know pass almost unnoticed.

She acted at once. She knew not a moment was to be lost if Symee was to be carried off, so telling her to pack her things, Amice ordered the pony-carriage, gave a short explanation to Elva, and then she went to the vicarage to see Herbert Heaton. Miss Heaton was more than shocked when she heard Amice ask to have a few words alone with the vicar. Had she been able to prevent it she would have done so, but there was no time. Amice was very shy when she had to talk.

"I want to tell you, Mr. Heaton, that I am going to London with Symee Vicary. Her brother is in trouble, and the time has come when she certainly ought to be with him"

Herbert remembered the former conversation and felt guilty. He had indeed called upon Vicary, but he had not found him at home, and so he had dropped the idea of

talking to him, vaguely putting it off till the young man should come back to Rushbrook. Something in Amice's bearing seemed like a silent rebuke.

"Have you got your father's leave, Miss Amice? I thought—"

"No, I am going without; but it is better so. Symee has so little power of making up her mind. It is our fault; she has never had to rough it. Gold seems to do so much harm—oh, so much!"

Herbert felt that Amice Kestell was certainly not like other girls; she was a little peculiar, but good—yes, certainly, very good.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, not knowing what she expected of him.

"I want your sanction," she said, slowly, and looking at him very earnestly. "You are a clergyman, you can bind and loose, it is your gift. I want you to let me go against my father's wish."

Herbert Heaton was a very high-minded man, and believed in his orders more than many of his fellow-clergy, still, to be asked point-blank to use his power in this strange manner was a case he had never considered.

"You mean that—"

"That my father is angry with me—very angry—about Symee; still it is right, and you ought to be able to tell me so."

"But the circumstances I hardly know—obedience to parents is a distinct commandment—very distinct, in fact—"

Amice lowered her blue eyes from his face; there was no help to be had here.

"Thank you," she said; "I see I must go on my own responsibility. Good-bye; I am in a hurry."

Miss Heaton little guessed the reason of Amice's visit. She was only very indignant that a young lady should dare to ask for a private interview.

"Herbert, you will get yourself into difficulties with that meek-eyed girl. She is very, very bold. Why, Elva, although she has made such a bungle of her affairs, at least never asks for private interviews. What was it about?"

Herbert felt a little ruffled; women were really made to be a trial to men, especially to young men who only asked to be left alone.

"A matter of no consequence."

"That is just what I thought. A mere excuse for seeing you alone."

"Nonsense," said Herbert, retreating to his study, knowing as he did so that he was running away from a scolding which would have to be delivered in the future, and anticipation always increases the value either good or bad of what is expected.

Amice saw she must rely on herself alone, and without further waiting, or even allowing Symee to say good-bye to any one but Elva, she drove off to the station.

Poor Symee! in spite of days of unhappiness, she was somewhat like the Israelites, she was fearful of leaving the leeks and the melons of Egypt. What was Jesse's present position? She knew he was very poor, and then his letters had been so strange that she was afraid.

"Miss Amice, you'll come with me and explain it to Jesse, won't you? He may be angry with me."

"He can not be angry with you. You have some money saved, Symee, and that will help you both for a time at least, and remember I trust you to write to me for anything you want. There can be no ceremony between us."

"You have always been good to me, Miss Amice."

They did not say much on the way, both had too much to think about.

At last they were on their way to Golden Sparrow Street. Jesse was still in that enchanting neighborhood; he had only moved down lower in the scale of his society, and had a room now in the same house as the inventor, Obed Diggings.

Amice had never been so near to London squalor as when she and Symee stopped at the address Jesse had given.

The cabman stared a little as he put down the box at the poor house, and did not touch his cap when a woman opened the door. Symee blushed; it seemed too dreadful bringing Miss Amice here, and yet she relied on her to explain all the circumstances to Jesse.

"Mr. Vicary is at home," said the woman, and she pointed to a back room as she stared at the lady and at Symee's box.

Symee went forward and knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Jesse's voice, and as he looked up he saw a sight which made the blood mount to his cheeks.

"Symee, what have you come here for?" he said, almost savagely. It was difficult to recognize in him the old, kind Jesse Vicary.

"Oh, Jesse—Miss Amice, please explain! I have been so unhappy!"

"I have come up with Symee," said Amice, simply. "She was fretting herself ill about you; you are in trouble, her place is with you. Can she have a room here?"

Amice cast a glance round the place. It sadly wanted a woman's hand; it was untidy, and very mean-looking; squallid was the word best expressing it.

"What have you come here for now?" repeated Jesse, standing up straight without offering a chair or a hand to his visitors. "I did not ask you to come; you might have come once, now it is too late. This is no fit place for you, Miss Kestell; perhaps you will add to your kindness," he added, with withering scorn in his voice, "by taking my sister back with you, unless, indeed—"

He was blinded with a tumultuous throng of passionate thoughts that surged up like putrid sea-weeds in a high tide, and were flung up higher than usual on the scorching sand. The beautiful vision of Amice as he had once seen her had lost all its power over him; he saw nothing now but *his* daughter, the child of the man he hated, and of whose downfall he daily thought. Passion had already made terrible havoc in this human being, that concentrated meditation on injury had laid a mark as if of bodily disease on Jesse Vicary. His eyes had sunk in their sockets, his cheeks were deathly pale, he seemed already possessed by an evil spirit that allowed him no rest. No wonder that Symee shrunk a little nearer to Miss Amice. She could hardly recognize her brother in this man. Amice alone remained composed and unmoved. She looked at Jesse straight in the face.

"You are soured by trouble, Mr. Vicary; you do not mean what you say. Symee's duty is with you now. She can come back to us whenever she likes, but at present she will be happier here."

"Happier!" laughed Jesse. "Symee long ago declined poverty."

"No, no, Jesse, not that; but I had a duty to Mr. Kestell to—"

"How dare you mention his name here, Symee? Remember, if you come to me, your past life is over—over forever!"

Amice herself was moved now. She felt her limbs trembling beneath her. Was the curse here, too? she had fancied that she could heal the sore. Instead of experiencing the power of quiet firmness, a strange feeling came over her as she stood before her accuser. How dared she presume to lecture Jesse Vicary, when most likely he was better than herself, but Symee had interposed with the impetuosity which now and then seizes upon timid persons.

"Oh, Jesse, how cruel, how unjust you are! What have you to say against Mr. Kestell? We owe him everything—you have often said so. It is through your own obstinacy that you are here. Mr. Kestell offered you a good position in Canada, and you would not take it."

"And therefore he turned me out of the work I could do here. Fine generosity!" The blood rushed to Amice's face.

"No, no, you can not believe that—you have no proof!" she said. "You have distorted everything, because you are suffering."

"I want no proof, I am certain." Jesse hardly looked at Amice, she felt that he only barely put up with her presence.

The very tone of his voice made Amice certain too; she saw it all, though she could not reach the clew. For some reason or other Vicary, this man who had done so much, who had been so exemplary, had incurred her father's displeasure. But what could she do, or what could she say? Nothing.

Jesse moved uneasily, evidently he wanted Amice to go away, and she saw that he did so.

"You will be good to Symee," she faltered. "She has done for the best. Good-bye, Symee."

Amice wanted to make one more attempt at reconciliation, but she dared not. As silently as she could, she took a five-pound note and slipped it into Symee's hand. But hatred is lynx-eyed; before Symee could say a word, Jesse had made one step forward, and seized the paper from her.

"Symee, do you not yet understand me? Do you think

that if you come here it is to spend their money, their accursed gold? There, if words are not enough, remember actions!"

He flung the thin paper into the small grate where it made a momentary flame. Symee had only time to exclaim before Amice, trembling and pale, had opened the door and fled. She was brave no longer.

"Their accursed gold, their accursed gold!" rang in her ears as she hurried away up Golden Sparrow Street, unheeding of the eyes that followed her or of the interest she excited among the neighbors.

"He, too—he, too, he knows it. Only we are ignorant—only we—we his children, who ought to know!"

That evening, spent with fatigue and utter misery, Amice Kestell was to have another shock. Elva, her own beautiful sister, the creature whom she loved most, was to be made more unhappy than she was already. She was to marry Walter Akister.

"Amice, don't say a word about it. Papa has begged me to consent. It is for his sake only. If it must be, at least let it never be spoken of between us."

"Oh, Elva, and even I can not ever save you!"

CHAPTER VII.

NEW FRIENDS.

When Amice was gone, Symee felt as if she were alone in a strange and terrible desert land, with no one to help her. She had not moved from the chair into which she had sunk trembling with fear when Jesse had snatched the money from her, but with a kind of hopeless despair she cast her eyes round the miserable-looking room. Her natural instinct for tidiness, and of liking pretty things, made her feel that this was indeed sinking down into wretchedness. Oh, what could be the matter with Jesse, the brother who had formerly been so kind and gentle! She was indeed punished for having left him to live his life alone for so long, now he appeared not to care if she were or were not there.

At last she rose, and from habit began putting a few things straight. In a corner was her brother's iron chair-bed, which was now covered with books and papers. The floor, too, was strewn with papers, some of them written

over, some with only a few words on them, and then torn across.

"Jesse dear, where do you get your dinner? Shall I go and see if there is a room I can have? I can pay for it."

Her gentle, pathetic tones presently acted as a composing draught on Jesse; it was the sight of Amice that had roused him—Amice, and the bank-note.

Though he was mollified, his voice was still strange and hollow, recalling the storm he had passed through.

"Do you know, Symee, that I am a ruined man, that I can not get work, and that—there, as well out with it—I have already been to the pawn-shop? It is wonderful how soon a man sinks down!"

"That is why you are not like yourself, dear Jesse," said Symee, feeling that it was no wonder her brother was like this. "But now I have come, perhaps luck will turn; you are so clever, people must find it out sooner or later."

"Do you think there are not thousands of clever men in London who yet have to—to—see their wives starving? Happily I have only myself!"

"But Mr. Fenner, Jesse, have you been to him? I did not tell you because you told me not to mention any of their names, but it is all so sad now. Mr. Fenner never came back to Rushbrook. They say that Miss Kestell gave him up, jilted him, but I know better, he gave her up."

Jesse gazed at his sister, and an eager look passed over his face.

"Ah! is that so? Then that accounts for his being away. I thought perhaps they were married, but—but—Symee, tell me when it was that he went away?"

How strange that Jesse, who just now could not bear their names mentioned, now asked after them eagerly! She explained as well as she could the events of the last month. Jesse stood up, and held out his hands to the fire, as if to warm himself; in truth, he did not know what he was doing. It was the idea of revenge that warmed him.

"I am glad, very glad, Symee, about this; the just retribution has begun, but only begun."

"Oh, Jesse, how can you say such dreadful things? What are you talking about retribution? They have all been so unhappy. Mr. Kestell looks ten years older, and he looks ill, too; and Miss Elva, my heart grieves for her,

she spends so much time in crying when she thinks no one sees her."

"That is why Mr. Fenner is still away; I have been to ask after him and to get his address, but no one knows it. Listen, Symee, it was through me that that wedding was broken off."

Symee opened her eyes wide in horror. She began seriously to believe Jesse was mad.

"Through you! Oh, Jesse, what a strange thing to say! You don't mean what you say."

Jesse smiled drearily.

"Yes, through me. That's only the beginning, child—only the beginning."

Symee left the subject, it made her feel so miserable to see Jesse like this. Had want of occupation driven him out of his mind? Then the sooner work of some kind or other was procured the better. She even made a suggestion.

"Don't you think, dear, instead of hunting for work here in this big miserable London, it would be better to accept that—that farm? I really wouldn't mind the loneliness. Oh, I would like it—"

But Symee repented her rashness.

Jesse almost roughly put his hand on her shoulder.

"Listen, Symee. You are my sister, my only relation, and I love you dearly in spite of some bitter disappointment you made me endure. You have come here of your own accord, or urged to do so by Miss Amice Kestell. I am willing to share my last penny with you, and you may spend your own savings as you like—you earned them honestly, I know that, or I should not say this. But if ever you mention that man's name to me again, or anything connected with him, that moment we part. Don't argue this matter out. You can not understand my motives, and I don't wish you to do so. But as to the truth of my words, ask yourself if I have ever deceived you. There now, I will see if you can be lodged in this miserable place. It's the best I can afford, and there are better men than I am lodging under this same roof."

"It's Obed Diggings' lodgings?" said Symee, uttering the first words that came into her mind, for Jesse had really frightened her, and she was glad when he went out, so that she might collect her scared senses.

Symee was not brave and hopeful. She did not pretend

to herself that she looked forward, even for Jesse's sake, to living in this house; but she could submit patiently, and she did so. A room was found for her, and the girl soon made the two chambers look, if not home-like, at least tidy. She could cook their meals, too, instead of having to go to an eating-house, and altogether Jesse felt the benefit of having his sister with him; but there was in him none of the joy about the realization of his once cherished hopes, he was grateful to her, and certainly he was more comfortable, but his mind had centered itself on one object, and this, like an evil weed, choked all that came near it.

Revenge seemed written on everything he looked at, even, when sick of the thought he wished to turn away from it, it followed him, and, like a beast of prey once given shelter, it would not be dislodged. Round and round like the tread-mill it went, or like an ugly monkey in a cage, going sometimes slowly, sometimes quicker, but seldom stopping.

Revenge! Revenge!

But though figuratively you can feed on revenge, the daily wants of the natural life must be supplied. Jesse had brooded, had planned, had written out ideas, but also he had been round to look for work. It was a time when work was difficult to get. To throw yourself or to be thrown out of office work was a very serious event indeed. Almost more serious if the appointment had been of long standing, for even with the best of recommendations there would come to the guarded mind of the possible employer: "Why, with this excellent character, should the firm have dismissed him? There must be something behind this;" and the shadowy suspicions had more than once shut the doors against Jesse. Every vacant post had a long list of applicants waiting for it, and the struggle for life, now felt for the first time by Jesse, made him more bitter than he was already.

But he had his literary ability, an ability which to many a hopeful youth is going to be the "open sesame" of glorious hidden treasures. It is only when it becomes a matter of hunger, of substantial bread that even the original thinker begins to find out that if the struggle in getting employment by writing figures and business letters is great, there is but little difference when it is a case of coining

gold out of brains—not easy-going, calm, contented brains, but fever-haunted, evil-haunted, demon-possessed brains.

The editor who had taken Hoel Fenner's place knew nothing personally of Vicary, but by hearsay he was the man who been ill judged enough to refuse a good position. The refusal of an article Jesse sent was courteous, but decided; evidently the paper in question had not been read, and in his present mood Jesse took it as another insult. He tried where he was not known, and the results, as usual, were slow, and by no means always sure. Between acceptance and publishing and payment, Jesse soon learned to make no tabulated time-table.

He had come to a low ebb when Symee appeared, and he was conscious of feeling angry because he could no longer receive her as he had once hoped. The benefit came from her, and this annoyed him, and aggravated the evil passion which, like a long pent-in volcano, seemed to envelop the whole fair country of his character in ruin.

Few things take such an effect upon us as to see what had once been green grass, studded with flowers, obliterated by several inches of hot ashes. It is difficult, almost impossible at the time, to remember that in some cases this same blotting out may act as manure on the natural soil. In every one there has been, or will be, a "Divine moment," but in every soul, too, there has been, or will be, "the shadow of their lower nature visible to themselves." Only, the presence of the Shadow demonstrates the presence of Light. It was because of Jesse Vicary's past striving after pure sunshine that he was now so painfully conscious of the cold shadow; he fancied the light was absorbed; he fancied even that he had never had it. He seemed hardly to care whether or not he ever had. To himself, and to others, Jesse Vicary was a changed man. This strange metamorphosis, this wild, passionate impatience which burst forth on the least provocation, was a new revelation to poor Symee, and she took refuge with Obed Diggings' daughter.

On the plea of incessant work, or rather of seeking for it, Vicary had absented himself from all his neighbors. The poor enthusiastic inventor had been decidedly repressed by his old friend; he could not understand it; but he was not discouraged, and the advent of Symee reawakened his dreams. Here, at all events, was some one who had heard

as yet nothing of the wonders of the new bouquet-holding frame which somehow or other was still in a rudimentary stage, and was not yet bought up by thousands in Oxford Street, but the faith that saw these splendid visions was not one whit shrunk or of lesser proportions; on the contrary, the delay was only in order that the success might be greater. And Obed, in debased Saxon, instead of mincing French, expressed his belief that "*il faut reculer pour mieux sauter.*"

A few evenings after her arrival, he espied Symee, who had now to take her twopence worth of milk, instead of viewing the large supply coming from the Home Farm. It was like putting a herring straight from the sea into a wooden bucket, and Symee was conscious of the unpleasant sensation of bruising herself constantly against the sides of the bucket.

Golden Sparrow Street was not exactly reticent about the affairs of its neighbors, and Symee's arrival was chronicled with the wealth of detail which belongs to that class; at all events, in Mrs. Dunn's lodgings the new arrival interested Obed's sick girl, and gave her fresh food for meditation.

"Father, just ask her to step in, do now!" said Milly. Milly always got her way, so Diggings one evening obeyed.

"Well, Miss Vicary, if I may make so bold, being as it were a friend and a countryman—Greystone was my dwelling-place, miss—and seeing also your brother has been always a good friend to us, if you will step down and visit my afflicted child, I shall take it as a mark of favor."

"Jesse said he was going out this evening; I will come down with pleasure;" and so Symee, instead of coiling Miss Kestell's dark hair round her head, found herself sitting by Milly Diggings' couch, while the great inventor, casting a strong odor of tobacco around him, poured forth his hopes as he cooled his throat with a pint of beer.

"It was a bad day, Miss Vicary, when your brother lost his situation; it's his first mortal trial, and he takes it a bit hard, but he shouldn't do so; he really shouldn't. What's an office stool compared to the genius of inventing? You shall see my last superb idea; Milly is delighted with it; but we must not take her opinion, as naturally she's prejudiced, Miss Symee; a daughter's praise is hardly worth the use of the letters of the alphabet as composes the words,

but every mortal eye that has beheld it says, 'Obed Diggings, there's no sign of failure here. Work on and perfect it,' and I do. It is nearing perfection; the brass wire that attaches the glass tube, Miss Symee, it's a marvel of ingenuity, though I says it as shouldn't. But you, too, will say it is; every one does."

The deep-set eyes glowed with a living fire, which compelled Symee to agree with the speaker, this living faith was too powerful for the girl's weaker nature.

"I'm sure it will succeed, Mr. Diggings."

"It will, Miss Symee, it will; and because I think your brother is a fine young man with a future before him—yes, it is for that—I have offered to associate him with my scheme. He doesn't accept because he's generous. He wants me to have all the credit, and all the profit. Well, I say Jesse Vicary is a noble soul, and I recognize it."

"Jesse is good," faltered Symee, feeling at once kindly toward the old man. "I wish he would not take this trouble so much to heart. I've got a little money saved, and before that is finished something will turn up—I know it will. I can't understand; it isn't like Jesse to take things hard."

"He wants the divine spark of the inventor," said Obed, striking his hand on the table, and taking a long pull at his tankard. "Good as he is, I fear he hasn't got *that*. Miss Symee, believe me, it makes up for many ills. When my poor wife had been lying for twelve hours in a state of coma, what was it that kept me up? It was the divine spark of the inventor. I said, I can't raise her up; may be God Almighty alone can do that, but I can raise up something else from here" (he tapped his rugged forehead). "I, too, can create. Believe me, miss, it was a mighty consolation."

"It must have been," said Symee, kindly. "Perhaps not just at the time, but afterward. I never invented anything, so I don't know the feeling."

"No, nor does Milly. She took after my wife. It's not given to women, Miss Symee, to be inventors; it's man as has got that. Women they picks up bits, and glue this and that together, and feel mighty clever over their mendings, but it's our makings that makes us happy, and different from the womenkind."

"But they—I mean your inventions—have never brought

you much--money?" asked Symee, knowing that in his prosperity Jesse had often helped the inventor.

"Money! What is money? No, not money, but fame is what oils the heart, Miss Symee. That chariot will be in a triumphant procession on which—" (Here Mr. Diggings a little lost the power of finding his chariot, and left it, hiding the retreat by coughing.) "Miss Symee, money is the reward of the poor imitator, of the man who steals ideas, steals my ideas. He gets money, money that burns his pocket like pure rum that scorches the throat. That's where money goes to, but do you think it will always be so? No, no, no! Justice comes with a leaden foot, but at last—yes, at last she strikes with an iron heel!"

"Doesn't father talk beautifully?" said Milly. "And he really has nearly finished his frame. Sometimes he doesn't always finish his inventions, but this one—oh, father, wait till it's really finished before you show it to Miss Symee."

"You and Jesse must come to a feast when that day comes, eh, Milly? And you'll go, my beauty, into the country; you shall go to Greystone, where you used to pick daisies and buttercups; and you'll have the doctor that visits Queen Victoria, our gracious majesty, herself; that you shall, and he'll cure you. Doctors don't look where the gold comes from, Miss Symee, so that they can see it's of the right color; but I forgive them, I forgive them, for they belong to the great class of inventors."

"Do they?" asked Symee. "Mr. Kestell said so often that Mr. Pink couldn't originate anything new; he always said the same thing about wanting sleep and tone."

"No, Miss Symee, every few years, as I can see in the papers, there's new names given for the same old diseases, and 'pon my word the doctors are very clever at making of them up. God Almighty was fair at the beginning. He made a complete set of diseases, and I dare say Adam named them along with the beasts and the things in the garden; yes, the diseases are the same, depend upon it, it's only that the doctors turns and twists the names about so as to make us fancy we have got something strange which they can cure. Kestell of Greystone must be an old man now. I remember him when I was a lad, spruce and spry he was, but not a rich man at all. It was all along of Westacre Lands, poor Button used to say, that Mr. Kestell

got rich—that's how he got the gold; but it was a chance such as doesn't come in the way of inventors. We have to get gold by the sweat of our brows as Adam got his posies and his corn, may be. We think nothing of luck. It's thought as triumphs in the long run—not a lucky buying up of land."

"Did he buy it of Button?" asked Symee, whose heart was at Rushbrook, and who cared more for a word about Mr. Kestell than all Diggings' inventions put together.

"No, not that. Poor Button's often showed me and Milly the deeds. It was a young gentleman that wanted to invest four hundred pounds that bought it. If he had lived there would have been a piece of luck for him he wouldn't have expected. The earth hides up a mighty lot of money, Miss Symee; locks it up till the right time comes, and then she seems to run it up in the market till she finds the highest bidder. She's cute, albeit she's so silent, eh, Milly?"

There was no chance of Milly getting many words in when the inventor was in a mood for speech, but she was too much interested in Button's deeds to allow her father all the conversation.

"Poor Button, father. He's dead and buried. I wonder if they buried the old deeds with him. He said that I was to have them when he died, for I liked spelling over the odd words. 'This indenture witnesseth,' was on one of his bits of paper. If you write to your ladies, Miss Symee, I wish you'd ask them whether the papers are still at the ——. Look here, here's Button's own will I made him write: 'I leave to Milly Diggings my title-deeds as are merely copies of no use to any one,' and look, here's his signature, but father didn't take the trouble to write about them, they was worthless, you know."

"I'll tell Miss Amice; she's always so kind that she'll make inquiries," said Symee, kindly.

So ended the evening, but Symee felt less lonely, and a sense of freedom crept into her heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A MARRIAGE IS ARRANGED."

Hoel was now really convalescent, but he was still very weak. He had sustained slight internal injury from the fall from the quay, and that, besides the other danger he had passed through from prostration with fever, had laid him low. Sickness is often represented as a time for mental reflection, but oftenest it is passed in a vague round of thoughtlessness that takes possession of the brain, and a weary and profitless wondering. May was approaching, and only now was the once keen-witted Hoel Fenner able to lie on a couch in his bedroom, and slowly string a few consecutive ideas together. Sœur Marie was still with him, and Hoel had quite decided that the Roman Catholic Church had done well in producing such an embodiment of all that is beautiful and womanly as the Sisters of Charity.

But Hoel had many other thoughts in his mind that, as he daily grew stronger, also became more settled and persistent.

These thoughts related to Jesse Vicary and to Elva. It was no good disguising the fact—he loved Elva now with the new love grown of absence, and perhaps too—so contrary is man's mind—from the very fact that he had cut himself off entirely from her. A hundred times a day he would say to himself, "I will put this case of conscience before Sœur Marie, and she will decide." But he had not done so, and now Sœur Marie no longer sat up at night with him, and did not stay all day. Soon the doctor would pronounce him fit to return home—home! How ridiculous the word sounded—and the delightfully simple remarks of this French sister could no longer be listened to.

"Vicary would be a good conscience-holder," he thought, "but then how can I ever see him again without telling him the truth? And how can I tell him the truth, and bring ruin upon Elva? Elva—good heavens! What a fool I have been! Why did I run away like that? But what is done is done. She despises me, and I can not defend myself, even though any gentleman would approve my conduct. Ah, would there be some adverse opinion?

Are we able to judge any one with a right judgment? Is not even common law often administered most unjustly?

"If I have been right to myself, have I not deliberately chosen to be unjust to Vicary in order to save myself the pain of forcing justice upon another? Hang it all! Is there justice anywhere? Don't we most of us accept injustice with a smiling face? Are not some rulers of society monstrously unjust? But custom makes them just. Can one pretend to do more than truly keep one's own hands clean? And I have done that. Well, I shall go back to London as soon as ever I can travel, and just see what turns up. But will Elva— No, I must put away that thought."

At this moment Auguste, the waiter, came in with "Misterre Fennere's" morning paper, and the first thing his eye alighted on was, "A marriage is arranged between the Honorable Walter Akister, only son of Lord Cartmel, the well-known astronomer, and Miss Kestell, eldest daughter of Mr. Kestell of Greystone. The wedding, we understand, is to take place early in May, at Rushbrook."

Hoel flung the paper away. Had he been strong enough he would have stamped upon it. A rage new and altogether foreign to his nature seized him; more overwhelming because he could not blame either Walter Akister nor Elva. Blame them—how could he? What must she have thought of him? Why, she thought so badly of him that she had been able to turn her love into hatred, and trample out her sweetest womanhood!

Then, after a few minutes, he felt angry with Elva for thinking badly of him. To be prepared to marry that Walter Akister seemed worse than folly—it was a crime. It was like a woman to be inconstant, fickle, shallow, and so on through all the usual and well-worn invectives against women, till his common sense reasserted itself, and he saw plainly that such conduct as his, unwilling though it had been, was enough to quench any woman's belief in any man. Enough, and more than enough.

Weak as he was, Hoel rose from the couch, and grasping the support of the mantel-piece, stood trying to calm himself. He had fancied he had cooled himself into indifference, and that his illness had taken away all mad regrets. They had never been mad till now, only now did he appear

to realize his loss—only now, when she had bound herself to another.

"It was because I loved you, Elva, that I did this thing, because I loved you. Will you not believe it without my saying so? How can I destroy your peace of mind, and what you hold dear, and yet love you? How could I see you— No, no, the dream is over, it is over, over, and yet would to God it were not!"

He leaned against the marble, and felt angry with his weakness, and angry with the fate that had brought such misery upon him, and at that moment Sœur Marie entered with her quiet, peace-suggesting ways that seemed to repudiate any stormy human passions.

"Monsieur is standing, he has the strength to-day; that is because I asked St. Joseph—"

"St. Joseph—pshaw! It is because that woman I told you of, Sœur Marie, is faithless, and is going to marry another man."

"You must rejoice greatly, as you told me it was not her fault."

"Rejoice! I do no such thing. I am very angry. She has no business to love twice; besides, I love her more than ever, just when I had fancied myself cured."

"We all have to tread the Rue de l'Enfer."

"Tread it—yes, when we have paved it first; but what do you think of treading it when one has tried to be an honorable man all one's life? When one has only done but what is right, and then the misfortunes of the wicked overtake one. The world is a place of injustice!"

"Ah, monsieur, it is the intentions we forget. Some of our deeds are beautiful, but the intentions beneath are very adverse to God. The intention is oftener self than God."

"I have done my duty for my own sake. Honestly, it is a pity that the motive of self-love is not oftener present if the result is good."

The good little sœur was not going to argue with a man so thoroughly out of sorts as Hoel.

"You are very good to tell me your trouble," she said, meekly.

"No, I did it with a bad purpose," he said, with half a smile. "Really, you good people can have no earthly peace. Just now my purpose is to get back to England, and leave this dreary place. No offense; but good heavens,

this has been a weary time. I never realized so fully before what I had gone through. When may I go?" Hoel looked quite humble.

"Monsieur le Docteur will tell us. If monsieur goes back to trouble, he will think of us with pleasure sometimes."

"With pleasure? With envy!"

"Monsieur must have duties in his country. He will have some mistakes to rectify, some love to give back. How much happiness the good God allows us to give!"

"To give—and very little to receive!"

"We can not give without receiving. But monsieur is so clever, he knows all this better than I can tell him, it is such a simple rule, a result that never disappoints one."

"I don't know," said Hoel, crossly, sinking wearily back upon his couch. "I never remember doing anything for the simple reason of giving and expecting nothing back. Honestly, there are few human beings outside dwellers in convents who do that, and then I fancy—"

"The convent walls do not make all hearts tender, monsieur, it is God, and He can work as well in the world as in the cloister. Here is a good thought—He is doing good always, all day long, even when we do nothing to help Him."

"I never have done good—Well, perhaps I tried to help a young man I met, but at last I did him an injury."

"And you will go back and repair it."

This was said so simply that Hoel looked up.

"If I repair that injury, I shall bring sorrow into another household."

"God answers such questions, monsieur. We have but to go straight on. Ah! but you know all that better than I do. It is a rule in earthly things as well as in heavenly matters."

"I thought I acted honorably," said Hoel, half to himself. "And yet perhaps after all that poor Vicary's right comes first. But does it? And Elva—Ah! now she will marry another man, have I not even less right to—Yes, that's it, fool that I was! I had everything in my hands, and rejected it. And now, now she is taken from me. It will soon be no longer my secret to keep or to publish. It will be more sacred, and yet—

"Look here, Sœur Marie, you are a saint if there is a

reality to that word. Tell me, honestly, with all your little tables of right and wrong composed like a calendar of the year, tell me what is right.

"Suppose a young man exists who has been wronged, grievously wronged, by one who is now on the verge of the grave. Suppose—are you listening or tabulating?—suppose a third person knows this, and that he would, he must spare the old man at the expense of the younger man, who is hale and strong, and will live many a long year yet. Ought not the third person to consider age before youth? I have put it plainly."

"Where there is a wrong to be righted, the duty is easy, monsieur. Go and right it. It does not take long to say."

"But surely you have lived long enough to know that right and wrong are not simple facts. For instance, in order to right that young man, the third person must appear to behave ungratefully; the old man's shame will fall on his family; the young man is not married and has no parents; the old man may be driven into the clutches of justice, of public shame in any case, and there must be many more complications. Already it has ruined two lives —yes, ruined."

The sister shook her head.

"Things are complicated because we fancy we know what will happen. We do not believe that God rules over everything. We think we must know results."

"And so we do; put two and two together and the result will be four, however much we might desire to see it five."

"There will be He who originally put the two and two together. There will be five."

Hoel shrugged his shoulders.

"We can not repair one injury by doing another; see, that is simple," added Sœur Marie.

Hoel did not answer, but he was not quite so happy in his former decision as he had been. Everything had appeared so plain to him when he fled away from England, and now nothing seemed right; he himself was out of his own reckoning; and, further, he was tormented lest this new idea should have sprung from the shock of reading of Elva's engagement. If he sacrificed her father now, it would look like spite. It would perhaps be something much like disappointed jealousy. Positively Hoel, who

had never had doubts about himself or his own course of action, now was tortured by doubt.

That ridiculously simple Sister of Charity was like a single dahlia. Truth was much more like the highly folded complex dahlia, its petals were to be so easily reckoned up. Right and wrong were abstract terms which only simpletons made simple; to right some men was to wrong others, all pure chance, a lottery, an uncertain toss-up; and to his mind there came back some lines which had before now made him smile.

> "Say the first straggler that boasts purple spots
> Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off;
> Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
> And two worms he whose nippers end in red:
> As it likes me each time, then I do—so He."

Was he going to be like Caliban, after all, and when the storm came, was he going to cry, "Will not eat this month one little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape?"

No, he could not escape the consequences, at all events, that was certain. Elva had changed; how she had been able to consent to marry Walter, he could not understand, and the fact was torture to him. Still he could not blame her; it was too late now to change his course of action; he had taken it, believing it to be honorable and the only one possible. Why should another way suddenly start into view and wind upward clearly in sight, not a smooth and pleasant way, perhaps, but not altogether so devoid of nobility as he had fancied.

Behind all this, in spite of that horrid paragraph, "A marriage is arranged," came the certainty that Elva was his superior, and that now he dared not go to her, and say: "Because of the sin of another I forsook you." He remembered some of her remarks—worse, her novel—the book he had so much despised, "An Undine of To-day." In that she had struck the key-note of her belief in a personal honor, a code greater, more large-minded, more unselfish than he had entertained, and he had then thought it absurd.

To feel utterly at sea with one's self and one's principles is not cheering to low spirits. From the beginning to the end Hoel now saw he might have acted differently. Why had he not done so?

By the evening Hoel had worked himself feverish, and

was angry because he was so weak. Sœur Marie only smiled quietly. He could have thrown half his books at her head. This new impatience was a good sign—an extraordinary madness, Hoel thought. He despised impatience as womanish and contemptible.

"Look here, Sœur Marie, I'm going as soon as you get that doctor to look in and say I shall not be doing a foolish thing. I seem to have made so many mistakes lately—as well avoid another."

"We will ask him to-morrow. And you have decided to go and—undo the wrong thing, monsieur?"

"I have decided nothing. I shall see what turns up. Nothing really matters now. I've told you before—if not, I tell you now—I was a fool—a downright fool. I fancied that a woman loved me, and now I find I'm the sufferer. I love her infinitely more than she can understand; she is going to marry another man, while I—it's strange, sister, but true—I would not take another in her place for the gold of the Indies!"

"It is again of your own happiness you are thinking. Why not think of her first? That other man will make her happy. Be satisfied with that; your great love for her is capable of bearing that trial."

"No," said Hoel, savagely, for his newly developed temper was, it seemed, in constant request. "No, it is not capable of this. Pray speak plainly, you quiet saints are in no ways chary of the truth. You think me even more selfish than I was before."

"One does not become a great scholar without years of labor, nor very unselfish without learning; monsieur thinks it too easy to learn."

"Easy—easy? I don't think it easy. I tell you plainly it's impossible. I can't be resigned to my—my darling's marrying that conceited coxcomb— No, that is what he thinks me; but anyhow, he's an unlicked cub. There, anything you like!"

Hoel used the good sister as a safety-valve.

"Anyhow, I shall go next week. I may as well attend the wedding, and be unselfish," he added, in bitter irony.

CHAPTER IX.

A VISITOR.

MAY-DAY has had so many lovers, so many fond poets and gentle female hearts dedicated to it that it is not for the common pen to add to the already unnumbered words of praise, especially if truth (which is greater than fiction), being told May-day has for some time past wofully misbehaved itself. Once she was a lovely maiden, clad with summer draperies, dancing the livelong day, and quite impervious to catching cold from wet feet, for she had an especial liking to green grass, or rather velvet sward, and she carried wreathed flowers and had nothing to do except to be on the lookout for some "rustic swain" who, regardless of losing a day's wages, could also trip it with her and the other maidens of the May, and further, was wondrously gifted with the power of improvising verses. Happy, good old times, and happier minds that loved the country and simplicity, and May-poles, and queens without thrones, and kings without gold pieces, and syllabub without indigestion, and many other charming things which, along with warm May days, have disappeared.

But custom has a strong grip upon us all: we cling to the old falsehoods with passionate perseverance, hoping against hope that good old times will come back, forgetting that when they do, or if they do, our tastes for syllabub will be gone, that a day's wages will seem better than a dance round a May-pole. Anyhow, when they come we shall then all be able to read: the poor what is written in books, and the rich what a too highly civilized society has written in their minds. Alas! there are no more May-days in store for us!

Jesse Vicary upon this May-day could have remembered, had he so wished, days of happy rambles in green woods; he could remember, or rather, he could have recalled, had he not tried and succeeded in putting such away, great thoughts which oftener come in spring days like sap that travels to the embryo buds; but for him all this had been swept away. May-day was to be his starting-point; he had fixed the date, and there only remained for him to accomplish his revenge. Having turned over many impossible

plans, he had settled on none of them; but he meant simply to go and meet Mr. Kestell face to face and—tell him the truth.

He would go and stay at Rushbrook in some poor cottage, and he would waylay him. He would force an interview upon him. Whose fault was it he was out of work and fast sinking down into hopelessness? Whose, but the man who should have been honest enough to own his fault, and not act a lie before the respectable world.

How terribly sad it is, we say, when we see a man possessed by the evil spirit of madness, or deprived of sense like the driveling idiot; but what are these compared to a man possessed with an overwhelming spirit of revenge?

Jesse had given up praying—how could he say the Lord's Prayer and still entertain the feeling he did? It was the sudden downfall of his faith in man that had shattered his other belief—for the time, at least.

May-day in London was gloomy, and the sun struggling out through misty clouds produced a feeling of closeness without warmth which was oppressive to the spirits.

Symee had made the small quarters the brother and sister could afford look something like home. Slowly but surely the girl was beginning to realize that there is something better than abundance of creature comforts. "Man shall not live by bread alone" has a depth of meaning which only a few of us realize. Symee, it is true, had worked hard enough for her daily bread, but she found that, anxious as it was to have to think of every penny, disappointing too, as was Jesse's strange, moody attitude, the freedom she experienced compensated for all the creature comforts the Kestells had given her.

How hard she tried to get something to tempt Jesse, how she treasured up little amusing sayings of Obed Diggings to win a smile from him—seldom with success; but all this had drawn her out of herself. She could not blame Jesse because she was continually blaming herself for not having sooner come to him, and now she fancied this was her punishment. Trouble had quite altered her brother's character, and not knowing the reason, Symee thought: "It is my fault, and this is my punishment."

On this May-day, though, Symee had a longing for the sight of the country, a longing which country people alone can understand. The gentle girl had spent a halfpenny

on a bunch of wild-flowers, and when the breakfast-table was ready she triumphantly placed it in the center.

"Jesse, look, don't you love wild-flowers?"

Jesse Vicary looked at the flowers without appearing to see them.

"Ah!" he said, pushing back the hair from his forehead. Then suddenly, "Symee, do you mind being left alone a little while? I can't find work, and before looking about any more, I must go down to Rushbrook."

"To Rushbrook? Oh! mayn't I go, too? Miss Amice will let me, I know."

"No," said Jesse, quickly, almost roughly. "Symee, you chose once for all; if you are tired of being with me, then go, but don't come back again."

The tears started in Symee's eyes. Could this be the tender brother she had once thought so gentle and patient?

"I will do as you think best, of course, Jesse dear, only as you were going—"

"Oh, I shall not be long. You can spend the evenings with Milly Diggings. When I come back I must find work, or else I had better take to street sweeping." He laughed a little scornfully.

"When are you going, dear? I must get your new shirt ironed, and—"

"I am going to-day. I don't want to be made smart, Symee." Then, ashamed of himself, as he saw the tears fall slowly down Symee's cheeks, he added: "When I come back we'll talk over plans, Symee, and you shall decide about the future."

Symee positively dared not ask any more questions, and, wisely, she set about getting Jesse's hand-bag ready. Before Symee's arrival he had never had a woman's care and forethought. It seemed hard that now it had come to brighten his lot, he could not enjoy it.

Every other feeling was burned up. He even did not recognize himself. The old Jesse, with his wealth of love and poetic fancies, was gone—gone!

It did not take long to prepare Jesse's hand-bag and then to put a few of his papers under lock and key. Everything was ready, and he stopped on the threshold as Symee timidly brushed his rather threadbare coat.

"You must look spruce, dear Jesse, or they—people

will think I don't take care of you. Shall you go to the farm?"

"No; to some cottage, or to the little inn."

"Oh, Jesse, you won't be very comfortable there. Why must you go? Stop here till we can go together."

"Stop here?" Jesse listened to the words, and they sounded to him like the far-off voice of a guardian angel, but another voice far nearer said:

"No, let me get it over now at once; let him own his sins and feel some of the misery he would have me feel!"

"Good-bye, Symee; take great care of yourself till I come back." And without waiting for further leave-taking, Jesse was gone, hurrying forward as if he were being followed by a host of enemies who wished him harm. And yet in truth the only thing which frightened him were Symee's gentle words: "Stop here."

When Jesse was gone, Symee sat down and cried as if her heart would break. Life was so very, very sad; the brightest dreams had been realized only in mockery; poverty stared her in the face, for her last gold piece had been slipped, unknown to Jesse, into his purse, and he was so absent-minded she hoped he would not find out her deception.

The future was a miserable outlook. Even poverty was not so bad as Jesse's altered character. Nothing she did pleased him. There was some terrible thought in his mind; she knew not what, but it brought him nothing but misery.

"But it was my fault. I rejected him when he was so anxious for me, so lonely. This is my punishment. How can I blame him?"

The days seemed long indeed. She was too miserable to go out, or even to go and see Milly in her room below; she was making Jesse some new shirts, and at these she stitched away as if she could stitch her penitence into them.

It was in this occupation that she was surprised by a visitor. The knock at the door made her jump, as she said "Come in," and then her face flushed all over as she saw Mr. Hoel Fenner enter. She felt so terribly ashamed of being found in such a poor room, so ashamed that such a fine gentleman as Mr. Fenner should see the altered circumstances of Jesse, for she knew how much her brother had prized Mr. Fenner's friendly kindness.

But after the first instant of deep shame, Hoel Fenner's manner surprised her so much that she happily forgot a little of her humiliation. In the first place, the man she remembered as the embodiment of refinement and health looked terribly ill. He was a shadow of his former self, and his clothes hung loosely on him as if they belonged to some one else. Secondly, Mr. Fenner seemed hardly to notice the poverty around him and to be only eager to see her, as he at once accepted the chair she offered him.

"Thank you. I am tired; it is nice to rest. I have been ill, and I hardly realized what a poor creature I was, Miss Vicary. I have had rather a hunt for you. I went to your brother's old lodgings, and there was not even 'Liza there. Everything has changed. Happily, the neighbors at last instructed me. Tell me, when will Vicary come in? I can wait, I must see him; I have only just come to town, and people seem to think I have come out of the grave. My lodgings are buried in papers and letters that have been waiting months for me." He did not tell Symee that one letter he had not dared to read and had put it away unopened.

Hoel noticed Symee's blushes, and her bewildered expression, and, with the true instinct of a gentleman, he courteously gave her time to recover herself. Only now did he notice especially the change of well-being in the lodgings and the poor surroundings of the place.

"It is very good of you, sir, to come here," began poor Symee, not yet feeling at ease enough to speak naturally. "I am very sorry, but Jesse is not in London. He will be sorry to miss you; he went away only this morning."

"Went away—where to?"

"To Rushbrook."

"Has he got leave of absence?"

"Oh, you don't know, sir," said Symee, finding courage. "Everything is altered; we shall never be happy again. Jesse lost his situation, and—oh, the weary work he has had looking for more employment! He can't find any, and it is dreadful to live in this big town and have no friends." Symee positively could not help herself; she began to cry.

Hoel slowly took in the situation. A cold feeling of dread and self-reproach crept over him. "It was my fault. I left him to that," he thought. Aloud, he said:

"Jesse Vicary without work—it is ridiculous! You don't understand, perhaps, Miss Vicary, but your brother has real ability. He is fitted for better things than office work. Besides, besides—"

"I shouldn't mind what work it was so that he could get something," half sobbed Symee, the long kept-in sorrow forcing itself to the surface. "I believe doing nothing is sending him mad. He is quite altered, quite changed. I don't believe even to you he would appear the same man. It's trouble that is sending him off his head."

"Vicary is altered. I saw something of the change you mean before I left. I was in trouble myself then, or else—"

The truth, which Symee could not understand, burst upon Hoel. Conscience said: "That is your work, you could have prevented this." What, was Sœur Marie right, after all? Was it impossible to right a wrong by another deception?

"Has Jesse gone to Rushbrook? I must go after him. I am going there myself. Miss Vicary, please do not distress yourself," added Hoel, so tenderly that Symee could now understand the charm of manner which had attracted Jesse. But she was wrong; this tenderness was a new feeling born of new thoughts.

"You don't know how terrible it is to see Jesse changed," said Symee. Now that the ice was broken, she could continue. "He does not even care about my having come here to live with him. Miss Amice brought me; she is so good even if she isn't quite like other people. She tried to make me see my duty before, but I couldn't, and then Jesse refused that farm in Canada, and somehow he blames Mr. Kestell. It is so wrong-headed of him. Mr. Kestell has always been a good friend to us, but Jesse won't hear reason. He is mad, I think. Mad with trouble which he has half brought upon himself."

Hoel was speechless before this revelation. He had never imagined Jesse would have acted thus, and had said to himself: "He is well off; why disturb him at the expense of Elva's father?"

"Why did you say he left his work?"

"They sent him away. Business is very bad just now, and it was a misfortune that could not be helped, but Jesse will think that Mr. Kestell got him turned away. Oh,

sir, how is it possible? Mr. Kestell got him the situation, and especially wanted him to remain there. Of course that Canada farm was a special offer—just a chance. But it's no use thinking of the past; I suppose in the future we shall have the work-house to go to, for Jesse will never touch a penny of money that comes from Rushbrook. Oh, Mr. Fenner, I know Mr. Kestell well—if I were ever to write a line to him and say we were in want, he would send me anything I liked to name. He is the most generous man on earth. Don't you think it is hard on me to know that, and yet to have Jesse almost cursing me if I suggest it? And this place, too! it's not fit for Jesse to live in, he who is only really happy in the country."

Hoel was almost stupefied by the pictures which Symee drew so graphically, because so simply. Yes, it was hard on her, but not so hard as if she knew the whole truth. Ignorance is oftener bliss than we choose to believe.

Hoel got up and held out his hand, but he was recalled to the fact of his silence by seeing the look of surprise on poor Symee's face.

"I will try and send you back your brother," he said. "I am going to Rushbrook at once—to-day if I can. You know, Miss Vicary, that there have been many sorrows connected with Rushbrook even for me." He no longer felt as if he were the only sufferer now.

"Yes; and, oh, sir! have you heard any particulars? Jesse won't let me write to Rushbrook, but I saw it in the paper that Miss Elva was going to marry Mr. Akister. I can't believe it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because she took on so—" Symee stopped suddenly. She remembered the evil words that had been spoken by the dependents about Mr. Fenner's sudden disappearance.

"When I left?" faltered Hoel, quite humbly.

"Yes, sir; but of course you and she had your reasons. Miss Elva was very proud. She never uttered a word, but I saw how it altered her. She changed, too, and you should have seen how tender Mr. Kestell was to her."

"I hope no one ever blamed her," said Hoel, suddenly and with curious energy. "She was blameless, entirely. Blameless she is now in marrying Mr. Akister. I was a coward, Miss Vicary, a— Well, I shall go and see her

married, and then that part of my life's story will be ended."

"She can't love Mr. Akister," said Symee, wondering what could be the true story of this breaking off, but woman-like, quite fascinated by this self-accusing man.

CHAPTER X.

PUZZLED FRIENDS.

A WEDDING in a country place always gives much food for conversation. Indeed, the couple about to be wedded afford such an endless subject for friendly argument and discussion that they deserve the thanks of the small communities to which they belong for venturing on the unknown sea of matrimony.

The halo of mystery which had settled round Elva's first engagement made the announcement that she was engaged to Walter Akister, and that the marriage was to take place almost immediately, all the more interesting and worthy of full and minute discussion.

Mrs. Eagle Bennison was at her best, and we might almost say, Miss Heaton at her worst; the former because love and marriage were subjects she was well informed about, and the latter because she was now sure that Herbert meant to marry Amice. She hoped by abusing the one sister to show her brother how to avoid the other.

George Guthrie had made his one attempt to stop Elva, and was now impenetrable when questioned by his cousin. He was painfully conscious of feeling that something was wrong, and yet quite unable to say what. That Elva was throwing away her happiness, he did not doubt, but it was not worth while to argue this out with Mrs. Eagle Bennison, especially now that the day was settled and that the female tongues were so happy over the "do-you-think" of conjecture.

The squire's wife in the fullness of her heart had offered Court Garden—and all it contained—to forward the marriage. It is so easy to be intensely generous when you are quite, quite sure your offers will be rejected. It imparts the same warm glow to some hearts as deeds of truest charity to others; it lifts those up in their own estimation in a way nothing else can, and it gives them opportunity of bringing into all their future conversation veiled hints

(half-expressed good deeds have such good effect on our hearers) of the noble offers they have made. Beautiful charity, shamefaced and modest, so willing to repudiate what she yet intends you to accept as fact.

"My dear George, you will be immensely useful to the Kestells; my choicest flowers are going down for the wedding-breakfast; at least I have offered them, but I thought you would just see, before I order them to be cut, whether Lord Cartmel had not already sent enough; besides, Mr. Kestell can afford to order them from Covent Garden, and it does ruin one's greenhouse for the rest of the spring if one strips it of flowers at this time."

George was in his most perverse mood.

"I assure you, dear coz, that Lord Cartmel is just now most busy calculating the relative weight of oxygen and hydrogen in so many square feet; he then means to divide one by the other and bring them to something else. There is not a chance of his thinking of flowers."

"But that stupid Betta, won't she think of it? However, you'll see, George; do your best to save my flowers—there's a good fellow!"

"Indeed I will. I don't think the bride or the bridegroom will care much; Walter Akister has no more idea of admiring the beautiful than a buffalo, and Elva—well, she is somewhat *distraite*, I notice. Is that the right thing for a bride to be?"

"Ah, yes!" said the good lady, lifting her eyes to the ceiling. "I remember— Oh, George! such memories are sacred!"

"Of course, and except on special occasions never brought out, I suppose, from the sacred shrine. Never mind me, cousin, if you have the least wish to air these memories, I am a bachelor, you know, so I haven't the ghost of an idea what nuptial feelings may be. I have the logical mensurative faculty which Carlyle despises; you, on the contrary, recognize symbolical work; you can see in Walter Akister, now that he is about to become the husband of a fair woman, all the worth which for years has been hidden from you and from the rest of the world."

"Dear George! You are so funny! Of course, Walter will be Lord Cartmel some day, when his father has done star-gazing, and then Elva will fill the position of Lady

Cartmel so well. Besides, she ought to be glad to get another offer so soon after that *contretemps*."

"Humph, yes; delicate affairs are best expressed in French. Honestly, I think Elva is throwing herself away in spite of the 'straps, tatters, and tag-rags' of nobility which she will acquire."

"Oh, George, what will my husband say to hear you talk so? Are you, now, really and truly, are you getting at all liberal in your opinions? Because if so John must show you that nothing is so bad as believing in the lower orders. I took all the trouble of getting up the T. A. P. S. so that every one might understand that dear old England depends on it's country gentlemen."

"It's a fine country," said George Guthrie, solemnly, "a very fine country is England, and a very interesting people are the English. Duenna cousin, believe me, I am not a Radical, I honestly believe in an Englishman—gentleman, I mean—and when I see him standing on his two legs with his two five-fingered hands on his hips, and miraculous head on his shoulders, yes, then I believe he is worth from fifty to a hundred—"

"Wedding presents," said Mrs. Eagle Bennison, dreamily, who had not been able to follow George's nonsense, as she called it. "George, instead of talking this rubbish, tell me, will a silver cream-jug look shabby to give to Elva? I can't put off giving her something any longer. It is a really old silver jug; it came from one of the Eagles, and the antique look is much valued just now. It feels heavy, too, but the truth is that it has been mended with pewter, which adds to the weight, but of course it also adds to it's interest, doesn't it?"

"Not to the interest Elva could get on it, supposing she pawned it."

"Pawn it! How ridiculous you are! Elva, who is as rich as Cresus, wishing to pawn anything, is an odd idea! But, indeed, I have such a strong feeling that it is waste of money to give presents to rich people when the poor live all round us."

"Or die all round us. Yes, certainly, I agree with you. I should tell Elva quite plainly that I meant to spend twenty pounds on her present, but that I knew she will prefer the check going into Herbert Heaton's bags next

Sunday, and that she must value the pewter-mended silver jug as a memorial of the gift in church."

"No, one could not say all that, for such feelings are, of course, quite religious. Yes, I feel it quite a higher call to give to the poor."

Mrs. Eagle Bennison privately thought she would not ask George's opinion any more, as he gave it too literally.

"By the way, George, what has become of Mr. Kestell's protégés? I never see either of them now."

"Like other protégés, duenna cousin, they suffer from patronage. Only to-day I heard that Jesse Vicary has come down to Rushbrook out of work, and that he is staying at the Joyces'. Poor old Mrs. Joyce makes quite a fuss about the honor. I haven't met him yet. The girl is in London. I can't think why she does not come down. Benevolence never stands contradiction. If the Taps turned against you, what would you do to them, Mrs. Eagle Bennison?"

"I should of course show them how wrong it is not to honor and obey their superiors; but happily that spirit has not come here. That young Vicary looked conceited. Mr. Kestell was too good to him. He's very much aged lately—Mr. Kestell, I mean—he's breaking up, I fear."

Mrs. Eagle Bennison shook her head mournfully, though she had not one mournful feeling in her heart; but she was so used to being like a clock out of order whose hands do not point to the right time that she was hardly aware of her own inconsistencies.

"Elva is marrying to please her father, so he must live and see his handiwork. Parents are selfish beings. Well, I'm off to see Miss Heaton; they will want to decorate the church for the bride's arrival at the altar of Hymen. Her empyrean eyes must look at nothing mean. I can suggest your orchids, coz; she must be embowered amid rich foliage to hide her tremors and her flutterings. Aurora must have her garlands."

"Oh, but I don't believe High Church people think it quite right to decorate for brides," said Mrs. Eagle Bennison, seizing a long-forgotten plank of safety. "No, George, don't offer my orchids, or if you do, say you don't suppose they would like them."

"Of course," said George, seizing his hat. "You are clever to remember Heaton's point of ritual—I had quite

forgotten it. They ought to be printed clearly on cards, like the deaf and dumb alphabet. Now, really, I'm off. I can't be sure of succeeding about the orchids. Miss Heaton is certain to find a saint, black or red, who will serve as a peg for votive flowers; but I'll try and spare your best. However, be generous, dear coz; put yourself in her place. What does our poet say: 'As though a rose should shut and be a bud again!' Try the metamorphosis. Remember your time of budding."

"Ah," said Mrs. Eagle Bennison, smiling and blushing, "what a lovely simile! such a memory as you have, George! What poet is it who said that?"

"Oh, only a chemist's assistant; most likely he thought of rose-water distilling when he wrote it."

"Dear! how very vulgar that sounds. Good-bye, George, and don't forget to save my flowers."

George Guthrie went off down the fir-bordered path with a smile on his face. He noted the gorgeous red coloring on their stems with keen pleasure, and passing a holly-tree full of red berries, made a little moral reflection on fruit out of date.

The object of his visit to Miss Heaton had in truth nothing to do with flowers, but he wished to see how much space in the little church could be set apart for the poor people. He knew Mr. Heaton might be placed in a difficult position if Mrs. Eagle Bennison and Mr. Kestell sent large orders for reserved seats so that the aristocratic neighborhood might see Elva married. As for Lord Cartmel, it was with difficulty the important day had been knocked into his head. Betta said, gravely, that her father was expecting a comet about that time, and it made him a little anxious as to a long absence from The Observatory.

"There must be scientific men to be some of all sorts," thought George; "but they are a very curious race. If Walter had chosen a kitchen-maid, his lordship would have had barely time to remonstrate. Well, it's not my duty. At present I'm bound from Tweedledum to Tweedledee."

When he reached the plantation that surrounded St. John's Church and Vicarage, he saw Mr. Heaton opening the gate on his way home, and George Guthrie ran up to him. (He had a bad habit of running like a boy, and had before now been reproved for this youthful folly by Mrs. Eagle Bennison.)

"Here, Heaton, wait a moment; the world's at an end; go and call the parson of the parish. Oh, perhaps you don't read Fielding, or don't own to it; the 'Fall' of Phaeton' won't provide a text, will it?"

Herbert laughed. It did one good to see these two men together; they had nothing to hide from the world or from each other.

"I have just been discoursing with Mr. Kestell's gardener about the floral arrangements for our little church on Thursday."

"I thought so—said so to my dear cousin. Of course you've found it to be a black letter saint's day, and that makes flowers permissible."

Herbert smiled.

"Has Mrs. Eagle Bennison offered her flowers? Spare her, Guthrie, I know the sacrifice is too great. Miss Kestell had sent word she will have none; but the gardener says differently, so I must let them do as they like best, I suppose. To my mind, this wedding is a sad business. I have had it much on my mind, yet what could I do? Miss Kestell will see no one—my sister was refused; and when I called she begged me to excuse her. Come in, will you? I can show you her note."

George's face fell considerably.

"A sad business. I call it a confounded shame. If I could get hold of that— No, I'll spare your cloth, Heaton; but Hoel Fenner deserves the gallows."

"The affair is a mystery; for my part, I can not accuse him without knowing particulars—I know none. I only listen to those my sister invents. Ladies are apt to grow eloquent on such a subject. But have you noticed, Guthrie, that the person whose duty it is to speak out strongly has never said a word. Mr. Kestell only once remarked to me that Mr. Fenner was quite unable to appreciate his daughter's worth. When I saw them together I certainly thought the contrary."

George shook his head, and at this moment Miss Heaton appeared and anxiously exclaimed:

"Oh, there you are, Herbert! How late you are! I knew you would be! Indeed, Mr. Guthrie, when Herbert goes to Rushbrook House there is no knowing when he will return."

"You must expect such troubles, Miss Heaton," an-

swered George, wickedly, for he understood the severe lady's innuendoes. "He has been talking of love and marriage. You should have sent *me*. You remember Doctor Johnson's answer to the lady who asked him what love was? 'The wisdom of the fool and the folly of the wise.' I came now to plead for free seats for the rag-tag and bob-tail, Heaton. You should hear how the poor folk talk of the wedding; and, unfortunately, as the church is small, many will have to disappoint their eyes."

"I do not allow them to gossip to *me* about things that do not concern them," said Miss Heaton, severely. "The poor are abominably curious; they will go to any sight, and are quite indifferent whether it is a wedding or an inquest on a murdered man. I believe they prefer the latter."

"In this innocent pastoral district I am afraid we can't provide that; so, Miss Heaton, be merciful and wink at the weakness of the unwashed portion of the parish."

"It is all very well for a free lance like you, Mr. Guthrie, but they look to me for an example."

"'Tis indeed a post of observation, Miss Heaton; I do sincerely sympathize with you; were I in your place I fear I should commit suicide; to be forced to think always of my character and reputation would—but no, I will not praise you. I will remember Bishop Beveridge—pray, Heaton, note that I am impartial in my quotations, and range from Fielding to Beveridge—the worthy prelate, said: 'I resolve never to speak of a man's virtues before his face, nor of his faults behind his back.' By the way, if he did the opposite I should have bidden him good-morning, and said *au revoir* till we meet in a happier clime."

"Incorrigible!" laughed the vicar; "but if you can come down to common sense, tell me whether you have heard of Jesse Vicary's being about? I met him just now; and really I should hardly have known him. He avoided me, so I could not get speech with him."

"Out of work, I gather, and seems to think Mr. Kestell has something to do with it. The truth is, the poor fellow is rather proud. He's learning experience, which, by the way, I always find a great waste of time, for like the stern lights of a ship it only lights up what's behind."

"I must go now, Mr. Guthrie," said Miss Heaton, who looked upon him with barely disguised scorn. "There is

to be a procession of school children on the wedding-day. I should like them to sing a hymn when the bride appears at the beginning of the plantation."

"Little dears! how they will wake the echoes with their sweet trebles! Do you remember, Miss Heaton, the difficulty a certain bishop was in how best to open the conversation with Johnson, so chancing to look at a few trees which stood close by he remarked that they grew very large and strong. 'Sir,' said the doctor, 'they have nothing else to do.' Our school children can learn several hymns for the procession and the recession. That's right, isn't it, Heaton?"

Miss Heaton wanted to say: "What a foolish anecdote!" but she was not quite sure if Mr. Guthrie were laughing at her, so she retired with dignity, saying quietly she had never heard that story before, and it did not seem to have much point.

Herbert could not hide his amusement; but as they walked out of the lane his real anxiety soon made him turn once more to the subject on his mind. Unlike his sister, he knew that below all the fun and foolishness of the outside man, George Guthrie had a very true heart.

"I may be somewhat foolish, Guthrie," he said, "but I dislike reading the marriage service when I feel 'To love, honor, obey' means little or nothing."

"I have given up scruples because the more one thinks of it the more it seems to me that civilized society is a sham. I never should have thought that old Kestell was mercenary; and as to Elva—no, I'm sure she is not—but there is some powerful motive at work which baffles me. Mrs. Kestell rules them all; perhaps she fancies that her daughter, having been mixed up with an unfortunate affair, had better accept the very next good offer; but, good gracious! if any one can afford to wait, it is an heiress. Of course, after a certain age and *faute de mieux* she could advertise."

"There is nothing pleasant about this engagement. Miss Amice answers all the letters about wedding presents; and if she were a nun Miss Kestell could not live a more secluded life. How am I to— But look, Guthrie, who is that man walking up toward the Beacon? If you were to ask me I should say— Who would you say it was like?"

George Guthrie glanced up quickly. He was a little

short-sighted, but the same thought at once presented itself to him. The man they gazed at was walking very quickly toward the solitary cottage of the Joyces, which stood high on the slope of the Beacon.

"By George, Heaton! I should say it was Hoel Fenner."

"So should I; but it hardly seems to be the right moment for his appearance."

"And the wedding the day after to-morrow! I call it an unseemly thing to do. If you'll excuse me, Heaton, I'll go and find him."

"No, no; wait till we are sure; besides, what can you say?"

George Guthrie laughed.

"Thank you. Of course, for a moment I forgot my principle of *laisser faire*. Perhaps his appearance is another sign of the goodness of Providence. Do you remember the itinerant preacher's remark: 'My friends, it is another instance of the goodness of Providence that large rivers always flow by large towns'?"

Herbert Heaton smiled, but added:

"Guthrie, I can not understand my own feelings, but I have a presentiment of evil—a strong presentiment. I beseech you weigh your words if you meet Hoel Fenner."

CHAPTER XI.

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

No wonder that outsiders were puzzled by the unusual apathy that reigned at Rushbrook House with reference to Elva Kestell's marriage with Walter Akister. Ever since the day when she had consented, she had never, except to go to church, set foot outside the grounds of Rushbrook, and she had allowed no one to mention her marriage to her but Amice and her mother. From her mother, indeed, she tried to hide her motives, but with Amice she could not succeed; then she had decidedly and sternly forbidden the subject to be again mentioned between them.

Walter had come down to Rushbrook, summoned there by a letter from Mr. Kestell. He had found the old man kindness itself; settlements were soon agreed upon, and the pale, benevolent face of Mr. Kestell was lighted up with true joy when he said:

"Akister, my dear fellow, I see that yours is indeed true, disinterested love. I believe you would marry Elva even if she were poor."

"I would," said Walter, decidedly. "I shall have enough for both; if "—he was suddenly fired with the idea that Kestell of Greystone might after all not be the rich man he was supposed to be, that it was for this reason that mean scoundrel had made off—"if, Mr. Kestell, you have the least reason for not wishing to settle anything on your daughter at this moment, please say so. I shall not mind in the least, neither will my father. Elva and I can wait till we are older to enjoy riches. We want so little for ourselves—and she loves you, I know, better than herself."

Mr. Kestell was at his knee-hole table, and he lifted his pale-blue eyes to the lover's face. There was nothing prepossessing in the young man's appearance—the habitual scowl even seemed more pronounced than usual—but in his words there was much that was honest and noble. Even now the old man paused. Was this another door opened to him? one more chance of escaping from the haunting thoughts that were slowly killing him? or so it seemed to him. Here was one who loved Elva enough to send everything to the winds for her sake. Everything—even honor? Ah, if he could be sure of that—if he was certain that— No, he could not be sure: so he rose and grasped Walter's hand with his more than accustomed fervor, and said:

"Walter, your words prove you to be all I could wish. As to money, we will leave your lawyer to settle that. I—I will settle any sum in reason he likes to name on her. But let the wedding be soon, very soon, for I am far from well, and mortals must not trifle with time."

"Soon! Mr. Kestell, I would it were to-morrow; but I must let Elva decide. You know she wrote to me—perhaps I might see her now for a few minutes. Otherwise I shall respect her wishes; she wishes to be left to herself till our wedding-day. It is all nonsense about getting well acquainted, we have known each other from childhood."

"You are very generous, Walter; it is not every man who would respect her wishes."

"What care I?" he muttered. "When she is my wife she must love me—must put up with me at least."

Mr. Kestell led the way to the morning-room; he knew

Elva was there; he opened the door with a trembling hand and called out:

"Elva, dearest, here is Walter."

Elva rose and came forward. Her father was gone and had shut the door before Walter hastily approached her. She held out her hand, but she would not let him kiss her.

"I told papa I would see you now, to-day, Walter; and then you know what I said in my note."

"Yes," he answered, sullenly.

"I want to be quite sure you understand. I want to say it now, and then we need never mention it again—never!"

"As you like," he said, with a gleam of intense passion in his eyes, though his words were cold like hers.

"You have heard that my happiness was wrecked. For some reason, which I do not know, the man I loved broke off our engagement. I have never seen him again. Papa tells me I never shall. I can not see how it can be possible; but I do love him still. I believe I told you so, Walter, and I shall never love another as I loved him. I do not love you, but I am touched that you should care for some one who is—who— Well, as for me, I am marrying you because papa wishes it intensely, and I love him better than any one else in the world now. I am not deceiving you, Walter; never reproach me with that."

"I never will; you are not deceiving me."

"Won't you reconsider your wish? Think, Walter, how much happier you would be if—if your wife loved you."

"I shall look after my own happiness," he said, biting his lips to keep in stronger expressions.

"Remember that when I am your wife I shall know how to make people respect you; but that I shall never pretend to more; and—and— Oh, Walter! won't you think better of it again? Won't you give me up now, now before it is too late?"

"By God, I won't!" he said, fiercely. "Do you think that, now I have proved to you the falseness of that man, now that you see how utterly unworthy he was to marry you, do you imagine that *now* I shall give you up? Why didn't you say 'yes' when I first asked you? Why did you let me go through that other time?"

The ill-restrained force of the unchecked nature might have attracted some women. Elva only shrunk from it as she would have done had she seen molten iron issuing from

the imprisoning furnace: to her mind love was not to be thus desecrated, for it was too beautiful a thing to be sullied with rude passion. She shrunk away a little further from him.

"I have suffered a great deal," she said, with the quietness of despair. "I can hardly bear any more. Good-bye now, till—that day. Remember, if—if you ever feel any doubt, say so, and I shall understand; I can face what people will say now," she added, with a smile so utterly sad that Walter turned away.

"You need not fear that I shall throw you over," he said, taking her hand and grasping it. "What do I care for the gossip of idle women? Some women's tongues are full of envy; some of them think you are a jilt, and if you were I would still marry you, Elva."

She motioned him away. This personal possession which he seemed alone to care for not only frightened her but repelled her; she experienced the feeling that if he stayed much longer in the room she would fling all her previous reasoning to the winds and tell her father she could not accomplish the sacrifice she was making for him. Why was he so very, very anxious to see her married? Why was she not a Roman Catholic that she might fly to a convent and rest? Why was her love for her father so great that for his sake she had done this thing?"

"Please go now, Walter," she said.

Walter had a momentary impulse to disobey her; but she was going to be his own so soon, why not humor her for a little while longer? Women were like that—so fickle and uncertain.

"We shall have time enough to talk during our honeymoon," he said, sullenly, and then he walked away without once looking back.

Left alone, Elva remained plunged in dumb misery. She did not feel as if she were the same Elva as she had been; she was some one else; she was speaking, walking, acting in a dream—a hideous dream. The daily events now made no impression on her mind; the last thing she distinctly remembered was telling her father she would do as he wished—she would marry Walter. Constantly she seemed mentally to be going to her father and saying the same thing: "Papa, for your sake I will—for your sake."

If now and then she struggled into new consciousness it

was merely to experience a feeling of such fear and dread at what she was going to do that she had at once to seek out Amice or her mother and begin talking on indifferent matters. This, of course, always turned on the wedding preparations. Mrs. Kestell once more began throwing herself into the preparations, only remarking:

"I hope, Elva, this time there will be no more jilting. I shall never show my face again in the neighborhood if you throw over another lover. As it is, I see Mrs. Eagle Bennison looks upon you as a very badly brought-up young lady. Then the Fitzgeralds, all their long letters of sorrow make me see well enough how rejoiced they are that after all one of you will not be first married. Louisa has engaged herself to that decrepid Hungarian count so that she may be married first and be called countess. I have told your aunt that as the Honorable Mrs. Akister you will hold a better position in society than any foreigner can hope to fill."

No. Elva made no illusions to herself. This time she was tied and bound to be married to Walter Akister, a man she had once despised and laughed at, but whom she was now beginning to fear.

She took no trouble with her *trousseau*, indeed, most of it lay ready prepared for female admiration. Wedding presents came a little fitfully, as if to remind Elva that she was said to have jilted her last lover, or, at all events, had given no rightful explanation of her change of purpose.

Amice answered the notes; that was the only thing she could do, having now accepted the doom. To see Elva suffer was far harder than suffering herself; but what could she do as the days passed by so quickly and that every hour brought them nearer to the wedding-day.

Mr. Kestell was the one decidedly cheerful member of the family. Elva did not notice that his cheerfulness was forced. She accepted his verdict that her marriage was going to cure him of his sleeplessness and of all his ailments, so she forced herself to smile and to appear cheerful as she sat with him in his study while he talked to her of his boyhood and of his parents, whom Elva had never known. The past was a relief to them both; for the time being it almost blotted out the present.

But Elva could be obstinate about some things. Not even her father's gentle remonstrance could make her wear

Walter's engagement-ring of diamonds, nor would she go and pay visits to rich or poor. She sauntered in the garden on her father's arm, but nothing more; neither would she see any one who called. To Mr. Kestell she said:

"Papa, I want to give you every minute of my last home days," but to herself she repeated:

"I know they are curious about my feelings; they want to probe my motives, but they shall not. That pain I need not have, for how can I be sure that I should not say right out how much I dislike marrying Walter, and that it is simply for papa's sake. Will Hoel see the announcement? What will he think? Why did he not come to me? Hoel! Hoel! my only love! What did I do to displease you? Oh, God! God! give me pride enough to do my duty; only that, only that I ask!"

And so the day drew very near. Only two days now. It was Tuesday, and the wedding was to be at half past two o'clock on Thursday. Elva had begged for that hour in order to avoid the wedding-breakfast. Rushbrook House was to be thrown open, and a general squash and tea-party were to announce that Miss Kestell of Rushbrook House had been united to Lord Cartmel's only son.

Mrs. Kestell's delicate state of health was excuse enough for avoiding a breakfast, and the tea was to consist of every choice fruit and every possible hospitality to make up for the disappointment of speeches.

Happily when money is of no consideration trouble is much minimized; and Amice, who wrote all the notes, was the only one of the family who felt the burden of the approaching wedding.

Amice was in a strange state just then. Elva was too much occupied with her own burden of sorrow to notice this as she otherwise would have done; all her actions seemed mechanical. She was always at work, but it was because she made almost superhuman efforts not to give way. Formerly she had leaned on Elva, now she knew she must keep up; formerly she could have retired to her room and on her knees she would have prayed that the curse might pass away, now she had to write notes, she had to interview tradespeople, dress-makers, she had to go out to the cottages and help Miss Heaton about the clothing of the regiment of maidens who were to line the church-yard path

as Elva walked up, and were to strew white flowers for the bride to step on.

And Amice did all this; but all the time she was conscious that this busy, active Amice was not the real one. Her true self was a far different person. A girl who felt that she was under a mysterious power of which she could not explain the nature; she seemed to see, oh, so terribly clearly, just as if it were revealed to her, every pang that Elva experienced and which made her miserable; she could divine her sister's shrinking from her self-imposed task, and from this she could easily deduce the future misery of the being she loved most on earth.

"And yet," thought Amice, "I warned her long ago against Walter Akister, and she did not understand me; I did not understand it myself. God sends me these warnings as a punishment, for they are useless, useless—utterly useless! And that other warning—oh, what is it—what is it?"

Amice put her hand over her burning eyes as if she would force back the new image. Image? No, it was not that exactly, it was as if her eyeballs were burning in their sockets, as if the great pain this caused her spread a misty veil of red over everything she looked at, as if this red color sickened her and caused her to long intensely to rush away out of the house. But when she did so the pain and dim red mist followed her, the air came like hot wind out a furnace upon her forehead. The sickening thought that she was losing her mind would present itself to her, and yet she could go through all the daily duties with perfect clear-sightedness, without a mistake. Only in prayer could Amice find relief, and time for prayer is not easy to get when the hours before the wedding could now be counted.

But one whole day before she should lose her sister! The realization of this swept like a bitter destructive wave over Amice. Only now she seemed to understand that she had done nothing to save Elva, but that she had accepted the decision calmly. Yet how to act when the whole heart is sick and when the brain appears about to pass over the narrow border which divides sanity and insanity. Amice fancied the air was oppressive, she fancied that it was not her own fault that she could not breathe when all around was bathed in that dull red color. Did it appear so to every one else, or was it only to her—to her that the curse

had come? Or were these the signs of some illness that was about to attack her?

Should she ask Elva's advice? No; it would be cruel; she must bear it alone; it was braver not to burden others with her fears, especially Elva, who was in such sore trouble already. Life was, after all, not such a simple thing as it had appeared to her and Elva when as children they wandered over their beloved heathy hills. No, life was a network of fearful responsibilities, the skeins of which were always becoming entangled, and those who tried to unwind the tangles only made matters worse.

Suddenly Amice started up; she had forgotten where she was till Jones' matter-of-fact voice recalled her with his deep-toned "Dinner is on the table."

It was their last dinner together as a family. Amice remembered this now, and knew she had been dreaming all this. But was it dreaming or reality? Behind the curtain on the low window-seat Elva, in a black dress which strongly brought the paleness of her face, had been sitting at her father's feet with her hand in his, while Mrs. Kestell knitted and spoke now and then about her new nurse who had captivated her by much sympathy with supposed ailments.

Amice knew she was certainly quite awake now, even though the dull red color remained.

"Our darling's last dinner," said Mr. Kestell. "Dearest, you will come in, won't you?" he added, turning to his wife.

"Yes; Amice, give me your arm. It is fortunate that you are not going to be married. Josiah, go on with Elva and let me see how well she can take a position as lady of the house."

"The Honorable Mrs. Akister," said Mr. Kestell, playfully, excitedly almost. "I am sure the array of presents in the big library is enough to furnish a palace. You will quite change the character of The Observatory. We shall have fine doings this summer."

"You must come and see me every day, papa, or else I shall come here. Both, I expect."

Before Jones and the footman the conversation was chiefly about presents. Elva had wonderful power over herself; she was like a man going to execution: the last

pride left to her was to show no white feather before the callous and heartless crowd.

After dinner Mrs. Kestell retired to her room and Amice went with her, but she was soon dismissed in favor of the new treasure. Where should she go? The oppression of every room increased; however, Elva might want her, so she ran down again to the drawing-room where her sister had been singing a favorite song to Mr. Kestell. Seeing Amice, she rose and went to meet her, and drawing her gently to her father, said, softly, with a voice full of tears and yet that struggled against emotion:

"Papa, I leave you Amice; you will soon find out how much better she is than I am."

Amice's large blue eyes dilated as Mr. Kestell raised his to them; every nerve in her body seemed to stiffen, her voice refused to speak, an overpowering breathlessness took possession of her, and the dull red haze blotted out her father's face. She wrenched her hand away from Elva's arm.

"Let me go, dear, let me go; I don't feel well. I must have some air; don't come with me, don't follow me; stay with papa."

Then she escaped. She shut the drawing-room door as if she feared pursuit; she snatched a hat and shawl as she crossed the hall, then opening the front door she hurried out. She must get air, air; she must get away from herself and from *that*.

Down the drive and across the road and on to the bridge, and there in another moment she stood face to face with Jesse Vicary.

That brought her back to mundane thoughts when straight and gaunt he stood before her. His broad shoulders, mysteriously outlined in the half light—for it was still light—looked powerful; his very demeanor was new and strange, as indeed was his voice when he spoke.

"Miss Kestell, may I see your father, or, rather, to do away with shams, I *must* see him."

His tone of authority displeased Amice.

"You have chosen badly. It is my sister's last evening at home. To-morrow is her wedding-day."

"Excuse me, I waited till to-day to come."

Again Amice felt that she was the culprit.

"Do you want me to announce you?"

"I don't care. I *must* see Mr. Kestell."

"Come, then, you will find out for yourself that he can not see you."

"The time of *can not* is past; now it is *must*," he muttered half to himself as he followed her.

CHAPTER XII.

REALLY IN LOVE.

Hoel Fenner had not dared go and lodge nearer to Rushbrook than Greystone, neither here even had he found the courage to go to the hotel where he had put up on a previous occasion. First, because the associations connected with it were of too painful a character, and secondly because he was afraid of being recognized. He had chosen a quiet lodging where the good woman who kept it was, happily for him, a new-comer, and had never heard any gossip about Miss Kestell.

His intention was to find Jesse Vicary. His conscience now told him he owed it to this man to give him all the information he had unfortunately found out.

He set off to Rushbrook therefore with the full determination of at once making a clean breast of it, but before he reached the well-known place Hoel was thinking only of Elva. Every new scene of beauty that unfolded itself before him this May morning brought back painfully the thought of what he had lost. It was more than painful—it was maddening.

"My own folly, my own cursed hypocrisy. I fancied myself better than others, and, as that good, mild-hearted Sœur Marie said, in judging others I injured them. I thought him a scoundrel, and now I can not be sure that I did not act the part of one myself. Not sure? Yes, I am sure, but what is the use of accusing myself? It is too late, too late! She has long ago written me down a rascal, and it will not be Walter Akister who will undeceive her. Very soon she will be his, out of my reach forever!" His clinched hand and the perspiration that started from his pale forehead proved well enough his mental sufferings.

"I must see her again if only once more; yes, even if it is on her wedding-day—I *must*."

The longing to see her face was like the longing of a man who is dying of thirst for cold water. "Will she look

changed? Will she bear any trace of suffering?" He paused as he set his weary feet on the heather now still wet with dew. Hoel Fenner was by no means the strong, energetic man he had once been; the French doctor had told him plainly he might feel the effects of that cruel immersion all his life, and that he would always, or for a long time, have to take care of himself. Already Hoel had found that after walking a few miles he was much spent, and bodily weakness more than anything else inclines one to humility of spirit.

The great lonely heath was the same as when he had wooed and won Elva Kestell, but to him all appeared changed. The gray clouds swept slowly above him, only occasionally allowing a peep of blue to be seen; there seemed to be a feeling of sorrow in Nature which Hoel thought did not alone mean the echo of his own thoughts. Was the strong-minded Hoel becoming superstitious?

Having reflected on Jesse's probable movements, he decided that he would certainly not go to the Home Farm; perhaps he would lodge with the Joyces, and if not, they would know of his whereabouts. Most likely Vicary had come in despair of better sources of information to make inquiries of the forest villagers about his parents.

"He will not find the clew," thought Hoel; "but it is better he should try than— No, what am I saying? I wish to spare her again, and I must not; but at least I will do all I can to soften the blow. Elva, Elva, you have conquered. I love you still!"

By the time the Joyces' cottage was in sight, Hoel was very pale and weary, so much so, indeed, that he was glad to hear when he reached the cottage that Mr. Vicary was sleeping there for a few nights, but that he spent all his day wandering about the country, and was not likely to be in soon.

"If you want him, sir," said the old woman, "I'll tell him to stay in to-morrow."

"No, no; do not trouble him about me, we are sure to meet. I came down to see him, but there is no hurry. I am lodging at Greystone. I shall be coming over again."

Hoel hurried out, and when he was once more walking over the springy heather his conscience felt eased about Vicary. He had sought him out, and it was not his fault that he had not seen him. Now he would wait till after

the wedding to reveal everything to Jesse. That would be time enough, and by then Elva would be gone. It did once come across his mind that Jesse might go to Rushbrook House, but he dismissed the idea as unlikely. "He can not go without proofs, and these. How should he find them? Let Elva at least know nothing of all this; better so for her sake—for her sake! Have I not brought enough misery already into her life? I fancied I could forget her, that I could root out the remembrance of her from my mind, and now I see it is hopeless; but, good heavens! will it always be so—always?"

He could not bear to stay on this beautiful moorland; its beauty repelled him, maddened him; he could not stand being within sight of Rushbrook House, and yet so far away. Near or far, what did it matter? He was an outcast from it and from her. One day more, and then he could return here and see Elva giving herself away to another. Hoel Fenner turned his back on Rushbrook and hurried away in the direction of Greystone; his brain seemed to reel; weak he might be, but this thought gave him strength to hurry away. He fancied he should never have the fortitude to return and see Elva again, but at the same time he had an overpowering longing to see her. Once more, only once more, if even on her wedding-day!

To himself he appeared a changed man; all the feelings which had driven him away from Elva seemed to sink into insignificance compared to her love, all the pride which had forced him to throw away her happiness and his own vanished, although the obstacle remained black and hideous as before; but this remorse came too late. It would now be dishonorable to try and see her and speak to her. How intently he longed to go and seek her out and to throw himself on her mercy. Would she forgive him? No. Why should she? Her very act showed how utterly she renounced him, and how utterly she despised him!

At times he tried to comfort himself with the thought that he could not have done otherwise, that if he were once more placed in the same position he would act in like manner, but even as he said this he knew that now at least it would all be different, that Elva was as pure and as innocent as it is in the power of humanity to be, and that for her he could face shame. Now it was, however, useless to speculate on the "might have been"—useless, useless! The

word rang out with the clearness which despair seems to give to mental words. It was only now, walking on Elva's own heather hills, that true love made itself felt in the heart of Hoel Fenner. Clever, highly polished, honorable, a gentleman in the world's understanding of that word, he had yet never known what true love meant till this moment when it was taken from him. Only now was Hoel a lover in its noblest sense; only now he forgot himself in thinking of Elva's happiness, while before it had been that he had thought first of his own happiness in possessing Elva.

It was this which made the struggle between love and duty so difficult, and it was this which made him put off seeking out Jesse Vicary, for he could not resist the desire to sacrifice any one rather than Elva.

"What can it matter that Jesse should remain in ignorance a few days longer?" he thought again and again, as the next morning, after a miserable and sleepless night, he rose with his mind filled with only one thought. "Let my darling begin her life without another cloud at least; when she is gone, then I will do the best I can for the man her father has wronged. But it is not possible that she can love Akister. No, no; Elva, you can not understand what you are doing; you can not understand the wrong you are doing to yourself. To-morrow morning— Good heavens! is it too late even now? Shall I go to her and tell her all —all? No, no. What right have I to do so? She would say, 'Why did you not come to me at first? Was it to save me or yourself?' Fool that I was, it was to save myself! What could I say? Would she not scorn me a thousand times more?—she, so noble, so utterly single-minded. No; now it is for her happiness that I let her go on believing that I do not love her; she would not believe that I could see things differently, she would scorn me as I deserve to be scorned. And Vicary—what will he say? Will he not call me a coward for running away? I have not been a true friend even to him. It is enough to make a man throw up everything. Well, to-morrow it will be all repaired. To-morrow Elva will be avenged, and Jesse can be too if he so wishes!"

But to-day seemed unbearable. Hoel could settle down to nothing; he longed to fly over to Rushbrook and demand, insist, on seeing Elva; and then all the old reason-

ing came back and he shrunk mentally from the scorn he would read in her face, and perhaps hear her express.

It was terrible to Hoel to see his own conduct placed so clearly in the wrong, not by others, but by his own conscience; it was this self-abasement, achieved by his own acute reasoning, which was to a man of his temperament harder to bear than even public reproach.

Now, however, he mistrusted his own judgment; now he would not follow the instinct which told him not to delay because he felt it must be mixed with jealousy and hopeless love.

"You have wronged the woman who loved you and trusted you," said his silent accuser, "and you have also wronged the man who believed in you, and both these wrongs arose from your self-love."

For the first time Hoel understood the meaning of some words he had once read: "*Conscientia est cordis scientia*"—"Conscience is the knowledge of the heart." Not a mere petty holding of the scales of actions, not an anxiety to balance the pros and cons, but a much grander motive power striking directly at the heart and asking for the same justice to others which we give to ourselves.

The mental agony he had gone through reacted on his weakened frame; by the afternoon he felt quite unable to make further exertion, and a terrible fear possessed him that he would not be able the next day to reach St. John's Church in time for the ceremony. He must creep in among the crowd, for it would be impossible to go to the Heatons and ask for hospitality. It would put them in a false position; besides, it was more than possible that the estimable Clara would shut the door in his face, for Hoel believed that every one knew it was his doing that Elva had been forsaken. He must therefore pass in with the crowd. Should he be able to get so far? He felt already that the strain was too much for him, and that he was doing a foolish thing in going to have one more look at his darling's face.

He threw himself on the horsehair sofa in his dull lodging, and tried hard to compose his mind. How solitary he felt now the illness had impaired that former perfect health, how he craved for sympathy and love, and for all answer to his cravings conscience told him he had with his own hand cut himself off from both. He looked forward and

saw in the future a life of success, perhaps, but always a life with so-called public friends and public applause. He wondered if he should marry, but not one form but Elva's rose before his mind; she alone had been able to win him, and she alone he felt almost, though unwillingly certain, would never be displaced. Hoel was not a man to be easily influenced or easily touched by love. Well, perhaps then in the future he might marry—for convenience, and what then?

"Without true love as well leave it alone. I have had enough of shams; besides, now I shall not be rich enough to tempt the seekers after matrimony."

The outlook was dull, intensely dull, because Hoel felt he should sink back into the literary bachelor, the man who lives on small admiration and on the impertinent patronage of the ignorant, who admire talent simply for the reflected light. Pshaw! That life anyhow would be wasted, would be easily replaced when it was extinguished. After that—?

"I suppose," he said at last weary, utterly weary of everything, "I shall somehow or other manage to exist without ambition. Thousands of men do so; I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that if Kestell of Greystone is a scoundrel, I am as bad."

At that moment the landlady entered with a cup of tea.

"I'm sure, sir, you do look bad," she said; "but a cup of tea is safe to do you good. As long as my poor, dear husband could drink his tea I knew he was not going to die; it was only when he turned from it that I began to be afraid. Look, sir, there's a fine carriage going by! There's to be a grand wedding to-morrow at Rushbrook Beacon; it's the daughter of a gentleman who is well known in the town. The milkman's been talking about it—milkmen do pick up news and waters it too as they do the milk. Mr. Kestell of Greystone—it's his daughter as is to be married to the son of Lord Cartmel. It will be a pretty affair. They say the young lady is very handsome, and anyhow she's rich. Mr. Kestell has got an office in this town; Mr. Hope's his partner."

"Ah! I—I—think I shall walk over and see the wedding," said Hoel, trying to appear indifferent.

"You don't look fit for the walk, sir; they say it's five miles; but there, a bit of excitement is good for us all;

and may be, sir, that if you are contemplating matrimony it will interest you."

"I am doing nothing of the kind," said Hoel, impatiently.

"Ah, there's another carriage! Look, sir, it's Mr. Kestell himself. I believe, leastways, that's the same gentleman with white hair and kind face they showed me before."

Hoel started up just in time to see Mr. Kestell of Greystone's face.

"To-morrow," said Hoel to himself, "to-morrow!" Aloud, he remarked: "Yes, that is Mr. Kestell."

"Then you know him, sir? Well, no wonder you wish to go to the wedding! Mrs. Moreton was telling me yesterday that Miss Kestell was to be married before to another gentleman, but she jilted him. I dare say now it was to make the lord's son propose to her. Girls are so very flighty in these days. It's fortunate it's turned out well, but if she's one of the flighty sort, the first gentleman has had a good riddance of her, that's what I think! Most people pity the women, but I pity the men, for queer as they are, there is some very strange women among the sort as get married. My Bill says how God cursed the earth along of Adam and Eve, but I've mostly thought, sir, that the Almighty didn't curse it as we understand the word, but He just put love in the world, and He let that do the work of cursing. For of all the troubles we hear of, it's mostly something to do with love and lovers that brings 'em."

Hoel only retained one idea out of all these words, and this was that Elva had encouraged him to get an offer from Walter Akister.

The idea was insane, and he knew it to be so, but all the same he said:

"I will go to the wedding to-morrow, even if it brings the fever on again. I will!"

What small things determine the great events of lives!

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE SIGHT.

JESSE VICARY had heard of Hoel Fenner's visit and inquiry for him, and he had laughed it to scorn. It was this very visit that had hurried on his own action and his determination this time to act for himself.

"Mr. Fenner will ask me to wait another week and do nothing," he said to himself, as he went down toward Rushbrook House on the evening before the wedding. "I will not trust to him or any one else again. I will believe in myself only. It is because I am poor and an outcast that the rich are willing to trample me down. God knows I am willing to be poor, but, at all events, let me have justice; let the man who poses for benevolence itself know that his sin will find him out—has found him out. He may be too busy to see me, but he will not refuse—he shall not! Do not I see the whole thing now as clearly as if it were written in red on a white sheet? Yes, his benevolence when we could not help ourselves! His careful patronage for fear Symee and I should presume on his kindness—kindness forsooth! His anxiety that we should rely on ourselves and on our own work, for fear the world should say that he had led us to expect too much. Well, let all that pass; we were entitled to so little by the justice of the law, and that little he has given us, but when he saw that I had discovered his secret—no, I had not discovered it, I merely wanted to know, as every man may want to know, to whom he owes his life—then his conscience trembled and he turned against me. Did his paltry artifice hide it from me? No, indeed; when the truth burst upon me, it was in his lying face that the truth was written, in spite of himself. Did he then have one spark of honesty and own it? Not he! No; he had better ideas. Having lived a lie all his life, he thought to bury his lie and to ship off the children whom he had doomed to a life of outcasts to another land. I can see him now offering me that advantageous farm in Canada. How near I was to accepting it and kissing the hand that offered me such a blessing—how near! and then with this last act of benevolence Kestell of Greystone could have posed again as an in-

comparable friend! But Heaven does not blindfold justice as we do. I refused him and balked him in his well-laid scheme, and then Kestell of Greystone begins to work his evil plan still further. Does the old scoundrel believe that I am ignorant of the name of the man who caused me to be dismissed. Does he think I am such a poor fool as to believe Car & Lilley were not paid to dismiss their clerk? No; I was a weak fool before, but I have to thank Mr. Kestell for opening my eyes. What better person could have offered me the fruit of the tree of knowledge of evil? The good he never knew except when falsely painted to make a show in the world.

"I was dismissed, and then he believed that I should come and crave humbly for that Canadian farm. He little knew me if he thought this: I would a thousand times rather die of starvation on his doorstep than accept another crust of bread which was paid for with his money! And Symee's coming! Yes, I dare say if one were able to follow the workings of such a mind, that that too was his doing. He thought Symee would work on my feelings, that she would smooth me down, that perhaps—for what does he care?—seeing her suffer would humble me! He little understands me, his own—"

At this point of his meditation, which was nearly word for word the same which had seethed through his brain for days and weeks, Jesse Vicary had come upon Amice Kestell standing on the bridge.

She was his daughter, that was all he knew at this moment, and as for the rest, whatever obstacle might be in his way, he would now—yes, now—at last trample it underfoot.

It is terrible to be possessed with one idea, terrible to feel that life or death, joy or sorrow, are all of no account in comparison with the realization of this supreme thought! Had Amice decidedly denied him an entrance, Jesse would have taken no heed to her words. Heaven or hell, so he fancied, could not stop him now, and certainly not Amice Kestell, his daughter!

When they reached the hall, which was not yet lighted up, as the daylight had barely crept out of it (and Jones was very busy with solemn overlooking of the plate necessary for the next day's function), Amice Kestell paused, and shutting the door, turned and stood face to face with

Jesse Vicary. She could not see the expression of his face, but she recalled only too well how he had looked when she had seen him in London.

"Jesse Vicary, will you reconsider your wish to see my father? I am afraid you are not in a fit state to think calmly. Will you not wait till after my sister's wedding? We have had much trouble here since last year."

Amice's tone was very pleading and very humble. At another time it would have seemed strange indeed that she should be asking something of him which he would not grant; now he only chafed at the slight delay.

"I must see him. Tell him, Miss Kestell, that Jesse Vicary is here and must see him now or to-morrow morning. I have told you so already; why will you try and alter my determination?"

"Because you may live to regret this. If we have wronged you, Mr. Vicary, and that is what you believe, will you not think better of acting hastily?"

Amice crept up to him as if impelled by an unseen power, and laid the gentlest hand upon his arm. So gentle was it, indeed, that for the moment Jesse did not realize what she was doing, and so powerful was it that for a moment it was able to calm him enough to bear to listen to the end of her sentence.

"Will you try and remember that it is infinitely more blessed to suffer wrong than to inflict it? that it is not you who need a Divine pity, but all those who have betrayed their trust, whatever it may be? It is not because I wish to be spared that I ask for your pity. God knows if I were capable I would willingly bear all the misery for them, for those I love; but I can not; I can only entreat you to have patience, to accept the part chosen by the Great Example you pretend to follow, and whatever is in your heart to-night, for that sake, not for ours, to crush it out."

Powerful must have been Amice's voice and her words to have quelled even for this short time the tide of human passion, but Jesse Vicary had given his wrath place for too long to be able to master it now, or indeed to be kept back for more than an instant. He shook off the gentle hand with a movement of passion, and the flood arrested for one moment in its furious course raged only more terribly when the slight barrier was hurled away.

"Are you, then, in his secrets? Is this another trap for

me, another way of putting off the day of justice? I have sworn to be revenged, or at least to have common justice! Miss Kestell, I will not sink into the slum of outcast society without one effort at getting righted, or of making—"

"Hush!" said Amice. "You forget you are talking to Mr. Kestell's daughter. I do not know of what you are speaking. Wait here, in my father's study, and if he chooses he will come to you."

Amice opened the study door and beckoned Jesse in. Weak woman she might be when compared with this strong man; yet she possessed that dignity which, conscious as she was that Jesse was in the right, could not be crushed. At this moment she had the strength of weakness, and Jesse, though blinded with passion, could not have spoken another word to her after she had bidden him to be silent.

But in truth she did not wait for another word; she closed the door upon him, and quivering in every limb, she went toward the drawing-room. She did not give herself time to think, she positively dared not. That Jesse Vicary was determined to see her father, she felt sure. And if her father would not go to him, then most likely Vicary would force his way into the drawing-room. This must be prevented, and though she was quite unnerved herself, she was strong enough when duty spoke to follow its dictates.

She opened the door gently, so as not to alarm Elva, and pausing a moment, Amice saw something which made the blood appear to freeze in her veins.

There was a lamp on the piano, and Elva was seated there; she was conscious of this, though she only saw one object. This was her father lying flat on the sofa, one arm was hanging down, so that she noticed his hand touched the floor. His eyes were shut, and his face perfectly colorless.

Amice made one step forward, with a suppressed cry of "Papa!" The thought darted through her mind, "How can Elva sit there so unconcerned? Papa is very ill; he has fainted."

All at once, however, Elva rose up and said:

"Amice dear, what is it? Papa is here in the window-seat; he can't bear to shut out the light of our last evening."

Amice paused horror-struck; she gazed again at the

sofa; no one was there; what she had seen was—! Her pale lips refused to form the word, even her brain rebelled against the notion that what she had seen was but a false creation of her brain. What really roused her was her father himself rising from the low window-seat and coming a step toward her. With the light behind him she could not see his features, but his white hair gleamed in the hall light in contrast with his black coat.

"Well, Amice, what is it?"

His voice unconsciously altered now when he addressed his youngest daughter; to Elva's ears it grated harshly.

Amice made an effort to control herself.

"Papa, Jesse Vicary is in your study, but do not go to him, do not see him, send word by Jones that you are occupied."

The short sentences were jerked out as if by a great effort of will.

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Kestell, very slowly. "Why should I not go and see Jesse Vicary? I did not know he was at Rushbrook."

Amice dropped her hands helplessly by her side. She seemed to hear Elva's voice as if it were very far off. She did not move one step backward or forward, but stood in the middle of the room where she had first uttered her startled cry.

"Dear Amice thinks you are tired, papa," said Elva. "I thought you said Jesse Vicary had behaved very ungratefully. Please do as Amice suggests, and tell him you are busy. It is true, you know. I want you."

Mr. Kestell walked back to Elva as if he meant to obey her suggestion. He took her hand in his and kissed her.

"You will miss your old father, eh, dear?"

Elva's arms were round his neck in a moment, and a little sob was heard in the big, silent, half-darkened room.

"Miss you! Oh, papa, I am only going because you wish it. Even now, oh, even now—"

"Hush, dear! Yes, yes, for your happiness!"

He unclasped her hands.

"By the way, darling, I had better just go and see what the young man wants. Your mother is asleep, I hope. I will tell Jones to bring you a light. It has suddenly become very dark."

He walked hastily away, not once turning to glance at

Amice; and Elva heard him shut the door behind him with decision. At this moment, however, she thought more of Amice, who stood there so immovable. Elva went quickly toward her, fearing that she must be in one of her strange moods. What could be done if this were so? Because every one in the house was depending on her for the morrow!

"Amice, what is the matter? Speak, dear! are you ill?"

Amice opened her lips and tried to speak. She even raised her finger and pointed to the sofa; she tried, oh, so hard, to say "Look!" but all her senses appeared to forsake her at once, and she fell forward in a dead faint into her sister's arms.

At that moment Jones opened the door. He was carrying a lamp.

"Jones, go quickly and fetch the nurse, and tell her to bring water and salts—anything. Miss Amice has fainted. Help me to lay her on the sofa—and please, Jones, tell no one; she will soon recover. It is better not to frighten Mrs. Kestell, and your master in engaged. Thank you; now go quickly."

Jones was a wonderful servant; he obeyed to the letter, and kept his own counsel. Elva knew how terribly annoyed Amice would be if any one made a fuss about her. It was Amice's way.

It was a long time before Amice opened her eyes again; but when she did so Elva noticed at once that she was perfectly conscious, and recognized them all—Jones, the nurse, and herself.

"You are better now, dear. Nurse has such powerful salts here. Put your hands in this cold water."

"Thank you. Did I faint? How strange! It is the first time in my life. Don't say anything about it. You can go, nurse."

She tried to sit up, and saw she was on the sofa. The blood rushed back to her cheeks, and she struggled to her feet.

"I will get up. Thank you, Elva, I will go upstairs. Where is papa?"

"He went to the study to speak to Mr. Vicary," said Jones, respectfully, as he handed Amice a light shawl. "I hear the front door miss; I think Mr. Vicary must be just gone."

"Elva, go and wish papa good-night and then come upstairs. Tell him nothing about me, but ask him if he is well. He looked so—pale just now."

"I will, dear. Nurse will give you her arm." Then Amice went out by a side door and walked upstairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHAT COMPENSATION?"

When Mr. Kestell first left the drawing-room he met Jones in the hall. The latter was placing a small lamp on the carved oak table, and the softened light shed a pleasant gleam on the tessellated pavement and over the old oak furniture. Rushbrook House was very perfect in all that related to its interior decoration; the harmony of color always impressed new-comers, and prevented the wealth that evidently reigned everywhere from appearing in the least ostentatious.

Mr. Kestell, pausing as he watched Jones with his usual precision stooping to adjust the lamp, realized for a moment that though he was the owner of all this he was not part of it; that for years he had lived an outside life; and that beautiful as this place was, he had been always forced to view it from the outside. This psychological truth that a man may never really be able to make himself at home in the place where he lives, and of which he should by right be the keystone, belongs purely to the realm of that which we call spirit or soul. It may be that a pilgrim or even a gypsy may have his spirit so attuned to the harmony of nature that, moving daily from one place to another, he may for all that always feel in his right place, always at home, and that a rich man from the contrary reason may never join his bodily and his spiritual life, which can alone constitute happiness and repose.

Kestell of Greystone, for reasons which he knew but too well, but which he never analyzed, looked upon all his possessions with the eye of a stranger; all the same, he had spun the silken threads so closely around him that he was imprisoned in the coccon, and knew that it was impossible for him to make his way out.

He had the power but not the will to face the cold blast of the world which lay outside Rushbrook and all its possessions.

But the longing to come out of it was always there, and with it the dread also of some rude hand piercing his cocoon, and commanding him to come forth out of his silken chamber.

A Dante can invent bodily punishments, and would fain make us shudder at the suffering of the flesh, but he who studies life closely will know that it requires no bodily torments to make a purgatory.

Mr. Kestell, pausing in his own hall, could not so much as lift up his eyes and say: "Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner!" Long ago religion, the belief of an humble soul in the power above himself, had ceased to have any influence over him: long ago he had turned away and said: "I must rely on myself;" and now, terrible thought, self seemed to fail him. But courage is the last virtue to leave the spirit of man, and Mr. Kestell gathered up what remained of it, so by the time Jones faced his master, Mr. Kestell had made out his plan of action.

"Jones, the ladies want the curtains drawn. By and by put another light here; I want the lamp in the study. I won't wait for my own to be lighted. Vicary is in my study, I suppose? I will let him out."

"Yes, sir. Shall I take the lamp into your study, sir?"

"No; go to the drawing-room. I will carry the light myself."

Mr. Kestell felt that nothing could have induced him to enter that room in the dark, and certainly he had never in all his life been called a coward.

Thus it happened that Jesse first saw the dazzling gleam of the lamp before he recognized that it was Mr. Kestell himself who carried it.

This latter placed it on the writing-table without saying a word; and Jesse, who was standing by the fire-place, was silent also. Neither of them held out his hand, and without any previous words each understood—but how differently—that there was to be no peace between them.

Blind with anger as was Jesse, the force of habit is so strong that as his quick glance noted the outline of the old man, noted the white hair, as of old, just touching the coat collar, noted the more haggard lines of the features and the far greater pallor of the face, he was stopped in his first mad wish to seize him by the arm.

God has impressed upon age, unworthy of respect though

it may be, the power of exacting reverence. Was the mark on Cain premature old age and the suffering of sin? Even before the aged beggar we feel inclined to kneel and reverence his length of days, if not himself as a man, for the world will have grown very old in sin when we experience no shade of respect for the gray head.

The result of this feeling on Jesse was that for a few moments he remained silent, and that unlike his original intentions he allowed Mr. Kestell to have the first word.

The lamp was on the table, and the door was shut close before Mr. Kestell turned toward Jesse and said:

"You told my daughter you wanted me, Jesse. I have come, though you have chosen a very unfortunate time."

"Yes," said Jesse, so strong in his virtuous indignation that he did not notice that Mr. Kestell called him by his Christian instead of surname, nor did he choose to notice the tone of deep sadness in which the words were uttered. "Yes, I have chosen this time because all time is the same to me, and I care not at all whether you are marrying your daughter or further imposing upon the world by some act of benevolence. I have come here to get justice at last—justice from you, Mr. Kestell. Remember, I have asked for it before, but now I insist upon it. If you refuse me"—Jesse's voice quivered, for having once found the power of speech, he was not to be stopped—"I will proclaim it publicly. If you deny me I will insist on your proving me wrong, otherwise your own silence will condemn you as it has done once before."

Jesse had nothing to hide. His conscience, so he thought, was guiltless; and he stood up straight and powerful, and fixed his eyes upon Mr. Kestell's face. Here was another proof of the old man's guilt, if that were wanted, for Jesse saw that the blue eyes were at once bent to the ground, and that the hand that rested on the table trembled visibly.

"What justice do you want?" said Mr. Kestell, in a very low voice.

"What justice? How can you ask me? you who have posed so long for a good man, you who have made me believe in you when I was young, who—who—and now you ask what justice? Is it not the justice of my whole life that I am asking for—the justice of my birth, the justice of my lonely boyhood, my scorned youth, the struggles of my manhood? Is not that enough to ask reparation for?

But if you want more, take it. Do you think, Mr. Kestell, that I am the blind Jesse Vicary you once thought me, and that you wished me to remain? Do you think that I do not see clearly the truth now, and that nothing can veil it from me any more? Do you think that it has not eaten into my very heart and taken from me peace of mind and soul, and all because you are a mean coward and can not own even to yourself that you have broken the laws of man and God? And you fancy that by hiding them and making me suffer for your sins, you can blot them out?"

The storm of passion seemed to shake Jesse as the blast of wind sways the forest trees. Stranger still, it appeared to have the opposite effect on the accused who stood before the bar. His calmness was as the calmness of the cyclone center, terrible and awe-inspiring. While Jesse had been hurling out his accusation, Mr. Kestell's ashy pale lips had moved. The inaudible words he said were: "How can he know? Who has told him? It must be Hoel Fenner. But no one can know the whole truth—even now I can repair the evil, even now." When Jesse paused, Mr. Kestell said again, quite calmly:

"Tell me, Jesse, what justice do you want? What sum of money will satisfy you? And if you are a man, tell me plainly what you want, and I will do my best to satisfy you. But spare me many words for the sake of the innocent."

Jesse was not pacified by these words; on the contrary, they were like a sudden blast upon a burning rick of hay.

"What justice? What sum of money? Money! Money! Do you ask me that? Do you so little understand any honorable feelings belonging to a man who, God help him, calls himself a gentleman? Money! Why, I have already had too much of your miserable gold. I have had more than the law allows me. But if it were in my power I would throw you back every penny you ever spent upon me—ay, to the uttermost farthing! Have you not tried to force me to accept more of your money by depriving me of honest employment? Do you think that I do not know that it was your evil work that turned me out of Card's office? You thought to make me accept your Canadian farm. Now here is my answer: Not one penny of your money will I accept—not one; but all the same, I will have justice!"

Mr. Kestell raised his eyes to Jesse's face, and the look

that was in them was one of utter amazement. Had Jesse not been mad and possessed by evil anger he might have read astonishment in the look. As it was, he put it down to another hypocritical trick, both the look and the words that followed. Mr. Kestell put out his hand in a deprecating manner, and was going to exclaim, but suddenly altered his mind, as he said:

"I do not understand you. If you will not have money, what will you have? Have you no pity? Do you want me to—to—"

"Yes," said Jesse, quickly, "I want you to be honest and proclaim the injustice you have done me all these years. You who have posed as my benefactor, as my protector, who have pretended I was but a child saved from the work-house. No! Not me alone, but my sister, an innocent girl. I wish you to own at last your sin, and to take away from us the stigma of our birth. Own it once and then do not be afraid I shall trouble you again or allow Symee to do so. For the sake of my poor mother, whom no doubt your cruelty killed, you shall own that if we are outcasts, it is because to you, the rich man, the much-respected Kestell of Greystone, it is because to you we owe our existence."

Jesse made a step forward, as if in his blind anger he would willingly seize Mr. Kestell by the throat and make him speak out his confession then and there at the risk of his life.

No wonder that anger is called blind, no wonder that its fierce power entirely sweeps away any judgment and sense, otherwise Jesse must have noted that the man before him seemed all at once to change, that a faint color stole over his thin, pale cheeks, and then he heaved a deep sigh as it were almost of relief.

"You want me to sign a declaration of the truth about your birth?" he said. "Is that the justice you want?"

"Yes. If I am to carry the stigma to my death, at least you, the author of it, shall bear it too."

"You will not accept compensation?"

"No! a thousand times, no! Besides, I have no right to any. You have done your legal duty. It is in the sight of God that you will learn the moral right of every one of His children. There are some crimes which will be judged only at the last day."

"Jesse, you shall have your rights," said Mr. Kestell, in a low voice. "You shall have your rights; but have some mercy! Wait till to-morrow. After all these years it is not asking much of you. Wait till my dear child is married—to-morrow afternoon or to-morrow evening—give me till six o'clock—till eight o'clock—name your time, and then come and find me here if you like. After that time you can proclaim your wrongs—only wait till then. I am asking a very short respite. If you have ever had a kindly feeling toward me, let that influence you a little, and grant me till then—till to-morrow. I want to spare her. She is a good daughter whom no father could help loving. For her sake, not for mine—not for mine—wait these few hours."

The old man's voice trembled in its suppressed eagerness. The very mention of Elva's name gave him strength to humble himself before his accuser. Had it been necessary, he felt as if he could have knelt to ask this short respite, only this for Elva's sake. He had hoped so much—not prayed—how could he pray? that his enemy would not find him out till after that. Nay, more, let not the truth be suppressed. Mr. Kestell had hoped to escape altogether, but the blow had now fallen in a way that gave him, even at this eleventh hour, the power of asking for this delay.

Jesse Vicary had expected scorn and anger. He was utterly unprepared for this supplicating tone. It suddenly unnerved him, threw him off the high pinnacle of passion he had climbed up to; he felt bewildered for the moment.

"Mr. Kestell of Greystone wants to avoid publicity," he said, scornfully, stooping to pick up his hat. "It did not matter how many months and years the children good enough only for the work-house were pointed out in scorn. But let that pass. It is perhaps impossible for some natures to understand honor. Have your delay, Mr. Kestell; go and have yet one more triumph; but to-morrow I will have your written acknowledgment to do with as I like and as I think best. I will have the truth."

The two men who had so terribly changed places were standing close by each other as Jesse said these words, throwing into them all the scorn learned from mental suffering; but Mr. Kestell seemed barely to hear them. He was evidently calculating the precious minutes allowed to him.

"Very well, Jesse. Then to-morrow at seven o'clock come here. I will leave orders you are to be admitted. And—one thing more. I should be very glad if—if it were possible—that you should try and forgive. Remember, you will never be able to judge of another man's temptation."

Jesse Vicary did not answer. He merely walked out of the room and into the chilly evening air of the wide moor.

CHAPTER XV.

ALONE AT NIGHT.

When the door shut upon Jesse Vicary, Mr. Kestell remained standing in deep thought near to the window which had not had the curtains drawn across it. He watched the retreating form of Jesse with a dull, puzzled look upon his face, as if he hardly took in the result of the interview. Gradually, however, his ideas shaped themselves into some sort of coherence, and the inward agitation showed itself by a deadly pallor which spread all over his countenance. He looked ten years older than he had done before entering the room.

"It has come at last," he murmured. "But not as I expected. He fancied that it is *that* which has ruined him. What will he think when he knows the truth? what will the world think? what is the world compared to Elva and Celia? No, they must never know—never! How can I prevent it? How? How? While there is life there is hope, men say. Something may turn up. Strange things have happened. He may die between now and then. Die! Die!" He dwelt on the word as if it were one he had only just heard and was trying to accustom his ears to. He took hold of the heavy curtain with his left hand and supported himself thus while he passed his right slowly across his forehead.

He then realized that he was wishing Jesse Vicary to die—that if some one could at this moment bring him the news of his death he would reward him handsomely.

Was that murder? Something like it; and the hideous idea seemed to take shape and become like a thin phantom that floated near him and nearly touched him.

"Button died and I felt freer, but there were other proofs. They have been growing, growing for years. The

cloud was no bigger than a man's hand at first; it has grown; it has been increasing for years. It is like a weight upon me. The air is heavy, oppressive; I can not breathe."

As if it were really hot, Mr. Kestell pushed back the spring of the window and threw up the sash. The cold night air poured in like water into a newly made rift in a ship, and with this fresh tide of air the ideas in his overheated brain changed suddenly.

"Oh, God! is there mercy in man? What if I had told him all—all—would he have had pity, would he have understood? No, youth is pitiless, pitiless—for this mad idea he was ready to kill me, but for the truth— Ah, no! I did well to wait, to ask for this delay. Shall I face it, face it like a man, or face—that other thing? They will all know—all but Celia and her relations. Celia, oh, my darling! it was for you, for you I did it. But what have I given you, and what have you given me in return? Has it been altogether a vast deception, would it have been better otherwise? No! No! It could not have been; at least you have been happy, and the others, your children, our children. Elva, yes; but Amice—there, there again—curse it! that phantom follows me, looks at me with those cavernous eyes. Eh, what was I saying? Are my senses going? Was it all worth this—this agony—such a little sin. Sin? What is it? An ambiguous word invented by the priestcraft of all ages. Who made it sin? Why not do the best we can for ourselves? Thousands of worse things are called good every day. Sharp practice? What is all life but sharp practice? The law is founded on it; if I had done it openly, what could any one have said? What would John have said—John—John Pellew? You are here—no! what am I saying? If you knew, you would forgive. I spent every penny on them, and more, much more; and their name—what is in a name? How many care about a name? A man makes his own name. Jesse would have made his if he would have been guided. Foolish fellow! He would not—he would not. What am I doing here? The time is so short, so very short, and there is much to do. If I could go back step by step to the very beginning, I would act differently. I would have guarded myself better. But then at the end, the very end, would John have required it of me? Humbug! Pure nonsense! Who has

come back from the grave to explain it? Ah, but if it should be true!"

A gentle knock at the door recalled Mr. Kestell to common thoughts, for very seldom is it that a man, even in the crucial moments of his life, indulges in long soliloquy. The flood-gate of thought is so strange and overwhelming that it is difficult to represent it through the medium of words, any more than one can describe how the breeze becomes a hurricane, for thought is one of life's greatest mysteries.

"Papa, papa, are you there? Is Mr. Vicary gone? Amice was afraid you were ill."

Elva entered; her own face was pale and care-worn. She had gone through a great deal this day, and now the evening had brought new anxiety in the person of Amice. She was evidently in a very nervous state.

"Ah, it is you, Elva. Come in, dear, I am alone."

"What did Jesse Vicary want, papa? Has he thought better of the Canadian idea? Did he mention Symee? How I do miss her now! Our new maid is so stupid."

"A little matter of business, dear. You must go to bed and rest. You will have so much to think of to-morrow."

"Don't talk about to-morrow! It is to-day I shall remember all my life. Papa, you don't half understand what I am doing for you. You believe it will be for my happiness. Well, then, to make you think yourself a good prophet, it *shall* be for my happiness."

"Walter loves you," said Mr. Kestell. Then going to his desk, he drew from it a sealed envelope. "Look, dear, I was going to give you this to-morrow, but I will do so now. When you are on your honey-moon think that your old father is happy because you are enjoying yourself."

He himself opened the envelope and drew from it a Bank of England note for a thousand pounds.

"But, papa, that is too much. I shall want for nothing. Remember—"

"I wish you to keep this, dear, and spend it in things for yourself. It is safer in this way so that you can change it easily. He folded it up and closed her fingers over it with a smile. "There, go away, and sleep, and I must rest too. Your mother will not rise early."

"Good-night, papa, good-night."

She kissed him very tenderly and moved away for fear of breaking down, but he called her back.

"Say it again, darling. Put your arms round my neck. It is very terrible to lose a child. It unnerves me."

She could see this was true as she obeyed, but this time her tears fell fast upon his cheeks.

"We must be brave, dearest," he said. "For my sake you will be brave to-morrow?"

"I will."

"And you will try and remember that life is not all sweetness, child? You must be patient with Walter. I know he loves you."

"Hush, papa! We must not say any more about that."

"You will never let him, or any one, poison your mind about your father? Promise me."

"What an idea! Who would dare? If Walter tried to do so, I would leave him, I would indeed! There," Elva forced a smile on her lips, "that is answer enough. Good-night."

"Good-bye, dearest. And now go to bed."

Elva went upstairs with a heavy heart, but with a firm determination to be brave.

"It quite upsets papa if I am sad. I will not think. I must try and sleep and forget. Amice is right. Papa does look ill."

She went to a drawer and unlocked it. It was full of letters. Resolutely she took them out, and tore them across, and put them in the grate. When all of them were burned, she heaved a little sigh.

"If the past could be destroyed as easily," she thought. "If I knew, if— Am I doing right? Ought I to do this thing? I can never love again, but marriage does not always mean that sort of love; no, no, it can not! that comes but once—but once. Is not filial duty something very great, very precious in God's sight? It has a commandment to itself: 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' And papa's greatest wish is that I should marry Walter. Would he wish something that he knew would be against my happiness? He must judge better than I can—he who has loved so deeply, so devotedly. I will try to make Walter a good wife, only—I dread it—I dread it so much—so very much!"

Elva fell on her knees and hid her face in her hands. She tried to pray, and the words would not come, but prayer is far above mere words, and she who needed so much help could only ask humbly for comfort. The terrible misgiving, which would not, even now at this eleventh hour, be thrust away, crushed her. Was she doing right? Was self-denial in a case like this a self-denial acceptable to God?

"But girls marry every day for money and position," she said, aloud, rising and pacing her room in deep agitation. "And God, Thou knowest that that is not in my mind! I have loved once; why can not that love be crushed out utterly? It must be, it shall be! When does sacrifice end? Is it not the highest work on earth? Does not Amice think so? Dear Amice, for her sake, too, I must be quite composed. She does not approve of what I am doing because she can not understand my love for papa. God put that love into my heart, too. He took away the other, but He left me this great affection. Why, then, shall I not sacrifice all I can for its sake—all—all a woman can sacrifice?"

Elva shivered a little. It seemed as if she were slowly dying, as if all the fullness of happiness which had once been hers was now only a mockery. It had been a beautiful picture spread out before her in order to make her realize still more her present misery. Even now what she most wished to forget sprung into her mind with the active freshness of new events. She paused before her bookshelf, and her eyes rested on "An Undine of To-day." Now she could see very plainly all its faults. She had had the baptism of suffering, and she remembered Hoel's words about good writing being bought at the price of suffering. But she had suffered now, and Hoel had caused her to do so. Strange that through him she had learned the power of pain, the power of that mysterious agony of a world which is so very visibly formed for beauty and joy, and which also is unmistakably impressed with pain. We seem compelled to hand round sorrow to our neighbors when they are crying out to us to give them the opposite, but strangest and most divine mystery, through suffering is taught the highest knowledge—the knowledge of a Divine love!

Elva could not realize all this yet, she could only catch

a glimmer of it through the darkness of her great sorrow, but the glimmer was a slight comfort and soothed her weary brain. It was like ice on a burning temple, like a momentary cessation of pain, when the sufferer fancies he can bear no more.

Presently Elva remembered that if she didn't rest she could never go bravely through the wedding service of the morrow, and forcing herself to still her thoughts, she went to bed. There was nothing in the room to remind her of her wedding. She had said she would not have it crowded with any presents or wedding-clothes. For one more night she would be the girl who had lived a happy life. Poor Elva, she realized strongly that it is the mind alone which makes or mars our happiness; the outward circumstances only so far as they disturb the seat of conscious life.

There was certainly nothing to remind her of her wedding, but all the same, she slept but little, and the gray dawn found her with but the smallest remains of the courage which had till now sustained her.

Little did she guess, through all this self-torture, that the father for whom she was doing this had never gone to bed at all.

When Elva was gone and all the household had retired, Mr. Kestell still sat on in his study. He had much to do apparently, for he wrote on patiently for several hours, his hand trembled now and then from weariness perhaps, but at other times the bold characters came out strongly and clearly on his paper. Once or twice he rose to go to the old bureau and to take out papers and examine them. Once, too, he started up and seized his closely written sheet and taking it in both hands nearly tore it across—nearly—not quite. Second thoughts altered his intentions and once more he sat down and continued writing.

It was three o'clock in the morning before he had finished. The lamp still burned brightly, but the ashy-gray look on the old man's face would have moved any one's pity. He was very, very weary, but he would not own it even to himself.

The business he had set before himself was done. The most important part of it was all contained in a sealed envelope of the ordinary size and a large blue cover which speaks of business pure and simple. On the outside of this

he wrote in clear characters: "My Last Will," and the date. Then inclosed it in a large envelope on which could be read: "To be given to J. Vicary."

One envelope was addressed to:

"JOHN J. PELLEW, Esq.
"To be read after my death."

He pushed back the writing-case and the rest of the writing materials as if he were sick to death of them, and then he opened a small secret drawer from within one of the smaller drawers of his writing-table, and took out from it an envelope faded and tied with old-fashioned ribbon.

These were the secrets the envelope contained:

A small note in a fine Italian hand, signed "Celia Ovenden," a lock of pale, fair hair, somewhat dull of hue, and somewhat faded too by age, and lastly two smaller locks of hair folded in a white paper on which was written, "Elva and Amice," and two dates.

He put this last back in the drawer. The other, after kissing it reverently, he placed in his waistcoat pocket, the note he gazed at a long time before he inclosed it in his pocket-book.

"Celia, my darling," he murmured, "it was for you, all for you, my wife, my wife! my only love!"

Then he sat quite motionless for a time as if the very words were consoling, and lastly he rose, and lighting a candle, he stole upstairs.

Again he noticed the stupid stare of the round-faced sun in the clock, again he paused as if angry at the intrusion of this poor lifeless daub and quite mechanically he repeated:

"I must have that altered next time I drive into Greystone. I have always forgotten it."

When he reached the landing, he stopped and listened just as if he were a thief that for a moment was conscience-stricken when about to commit his crime. It was a strange feeling to have in your own house, but it swept over him strongly, and caused him to tread more softly and every now and then to pause again and listen.

But all was silent at this hour, not a creature was moving in the house. A very faint murmur of wind swept along the eaves, and a far-off cock-crow reached his ears.

That was all.

Then Mr. Kestell paused before his wife's door, and listened attentively, putting his head close to it. Was she asleep? Often Mrs. Kestell woke very early, this insomnia being caused by a life entirely without exertion, and then toward five or six o'clock she would fall asleep again, and declare in the morning she had had a wetched night.

Mr. Kestell waited to ascertain now if this were one of her wakeful hours. How earnestly he listened till the throb of the blood in the arteries could be heard in his ears. At last his listening was rewarded by the faint sound of a cough.

She was then probably awake—awake and conscious. What was she thinking of? Did he find a place in her recollections of the past? Probably she was meditating about the details of Elva's wedding. Did she from this go on to recall her own marriage, and the devotion that had been hers then and since? The love that had risen above all disappointment and above the rebuffs of a wife who suffered from *ennui*, the love that even now partook of the passion of youth and the intense desire that she above all others should think well and kindly of him.

How he longed to open the door! How intensely he desired to go up to her and give her one kiss and pour out the sorrow of his heart, and to tell her that it was for her sake that he had done this thing.

But almost as soon as the wish was formed it was crushed. Celia would be alarmed at his untimely appearance. She would declare that he had given her palpitations and disabled her for the fatigues of the next day. Therefore he only listened, and then with a whispered, "Celia, Celia, my darling, good-bye!" he raised himself to his full height, and went silently on to his own room.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRIUMPHAL ARCH.

THERE is a paralysis of emotion just as there is a paralysis of the limbs of the body. Men and women have gone through horrible events, have made fatal vows, and stood before the judge delivering his awful sentence without moving a muscle of the face, and without showing any outward emotion whatever. There is a certain courage of despair which has never yet been explained, and which

seems to be associated with a vein of recklessness shown most in mankind when in a state of under and overcivilization. If the problem were not quite mysterious, one might declare this strange callousness of self and self-interest to be inability, or a temporary inability, to balance cause and effect. This courage is entirely opposed to true fortitude, which is perfectly clear-sighted and able to balance the relative importance of action, and then to accept calmly that course which wisdom dictates.

Every day the world witnesses this strange phenomenon in human beings, and those whose minds are turned toward the hope of ultimate perfection in their own marvelous race pin their faith on this or that panacea which in the future will give wisdom to mankind. Till this is found, and perhaps the world will be somewhat a dull place when every one is perfect, there will be noble women who "throw themselves away," as the phrase goes, upon worthless men, and men who "might be anything," and yet are crushed by the incubus of a shallow wife, or one who, as if with octopus feelers, crushes the breath out of all high aspirations at their very birth.

George Guthrie was not a moralist in the accepted sense of the word, but this lovely bright May morning his usual spirits rather failed him, as he busied himself with the Heatons, and several of Miss Heaton's slipper-working young ladies, who were intensely flattered at being allowed to be useful to their betters at preparing the little church for the wedding. George addressed Miss Heaton in his mock-heroic tone.

"Have you drilled your school-children, Miss Heaton, in the art of throwing choice flowers for a bride to tread on? They must, of course, take especial care really to do *nothing* of the sort. The bride must carefully avoid crushing the lovely petals, and the pink-printed innocents must swoop down upon the flowers when she has passed, pick them up, and have them ready again for the same ceremony when she walks down the avenue as the Honorable Mrs. Walter Akister."

The young ladies giggled. Herbert Heaton, who was helping George Guthrie to wreathe the triumphal arch at the entrance of the church-yard, suggested that it would be almost more dignified if the children kept the choice

flowers in their baskets, till the bride came out of church. George, however, was ready with his answer.

"We moderns do not think much about dignity when we have to compare it with utility. Mrs. Eagle Bennison will be, I feel sure, most disappointed if her flowers are not scattered as the bride comes up to the church. I think she said this morning that it was an emblem, but I forget what of exactly. But if you take the advice of an old bachelor, don't make an emblem out of matrimony, for beyond the truel overknot it becomes a knotty question."

"What nonsense you do talk, Mr. Guthrie! I'm sure the wedding is very suitable in every way," said Miss Heaton, severely.

"I should be a bold man if I disagreed with you, Miss Heaton! Look how tastefully Miss Smith has intermingled the W. and E., and the pretty conceit of letting it represent love; could anything be more poetical and more like the marriages that are made in heaven? That reminds me; Mrs. Joyce told me this morning that on the Beacon one had very 'embracing air.' Now I call this occupation very embracing, don't you?"

Miss Heaton felt this was no place for her two young lady helpers, and said, gravely:

"You and Herbert can easily finish this arch. I think we ladies will put the last touches in church. After that, Herbert, I shall go and see that the school-children's baskets are all tied with white ribbon. Mrs. Kestell was very anxious that it should be of the best, as I told her it would do afterward to trim their summer hats."

The ladies retired, and George Guthrie knew that he was in disgrace.

"I declare, Heaton, I must have gone and said something wrong! Don't deny it; I saw it on your sister's face. It's this horrid 'W. E.' which made me forget that the ladies might take my little bracing remarks personally. It's terrible to be under a cloud, when we are expected to be making merry. But—no, save the mark!—this affair seems ghastly to me. You have read the bans three times, so you feel legal over it; it's upheld many a better man before you. I've read no bans, but really last Sunday I nearly stood up and forbade them. What would you have said, Heaton?"

"That it is a great mistake fancying we can order the

lives of our fellow-creatures. Miss Kestell is able to judge for herself. She is by no means weak. Have you heard anything more of that—that poor man, Hoel Fenner? Is he really in these parts?"

"I don't know. His apparition was ghostly; I have positively not dared to ask further, though, upon my word, I have a great curiosity to meet him face to face, and to ask him point-blank why he behaved in that dastardly manner."

"A woman is at the bottom of everything. An Indian judge put it tersely by saying at once: 'Who is she?' Why not think he may have had an excuse, and that Miss Kestell was partly answerable?"

George Guthrie shook his head.

"An old fallacy. I can take my oath that it was not Elva."

"And yet she is marrying some other suitor?"

"Under a false idea of something or other! Well, here's the arch, triumphant and all the rest of it, and W. E.'s enough to make the bridal pair vow to be divorced in a week. Suppose Hoel Fenner were to come? Gallus once more seeking out his Lycories."

"That's impossible. Now, Guthrie, I must leave you to finish this while I go and settle with the archdeacon."

George Guthrie was restless, however. To him the air seemed oppressively hot, and in the distance he saw the thunder-clouds rising slowly and gradually hardening their outline. He settled he would have nothing more to do with the decorations, and seeing Mr. Kestell's gardener emerging from the church, he bade him put the finishing touches to the arch.

"It's a very 'propriate day, sir," said the man, touching his cap. "There's many of the squire's men have got a half day to come and see the wedding, and all our folks have a holiday of course."

"There's marriages and marriages, Culver. Do you know the woman's answer to the good clergyman who was reproving her for the unseemly quarrels she indulged in with her husband? 'My good woman,' said he, 'remember you are one.' 'Lor', sir,' says she, 'if you was to go by sometimes, you'd think we was twenty.' I expect our friends of Rushbrook village are coming to see how they are to be made one again."

"Well, sir," said Culver, grinning broadly, "it's for better, for worse, and one has to take one's chance of that, rich and poor alike, and Miss Kestell is such a handsome young woman that she was sure to be singled out. My wife, she said this morning, Miss Kestell's doing right by marrying a gentleman whom she has summered and wintered. It's better than men who belong to the migrating class, sir; just come and look at you, and then are off without as much as wishing you good-morning. This arch is a handsome thing in its way, sir, and when we've done, I think Mr. Kestell will think it very tasteful. He's always wanting Miss Kestell to have everything of the very best. The poor gentleman will miss her sorely."

George Guthrie got off at this point without finding anything more original to say than:

"It's a pity that there are some things not to be purchased with money. So the men on both estates are to have a dinner to-night? That is a real British idea, isn't it, Culver? Well, good-morning, till two o'clock. If you see Mr. Heaton, tell him I've gone to put on my white 'ribbon.'"

George Guthrie was popular with everybody, on account of his treating rich and poor much alike. His sympathy was more prized than the money of the rich inhabitants of Rushbrook, because it was given as a gift of an equal and not as a dole, even though they all recognized Mr. Guthrie was a gentleman born and bred as good as any of the other grand gentlefolks who spoke so condescendingly to those below them.

George Guthrie walked slowly away across the common, taking a short cut to Court Garden.

The weather was certainly oppressive. It was that which was making him feel so unlike himself, that and his whole feeling of repulsion at Elva's wedding, so he thought. He had hardly seen her since those few private words he had had with her. She had kept herself entirely out of sight under plea of being busy, and it was impossible to do anything else than congratulate Walter, Mr. Kestell, and Lord Cartmel.

"Of course I did congratulate them, but I fancied the words I said would stick in my throat. May God forgive me for the lies I've had to tell! Her father gives her away, and Walter Akister has got a young lord to act as

his best man. What a farce it all is! Hang it, Elva will have no bride-maid except her sister; as well have an incarcerated nun as Amice. That girl is on the high-road to a lunatic asylum. If it wasn't that Amice told us that she specially hoped we should all come, I would cut the whole affair. What a sky! But the storm is rising, I'm sure.

"This won't do. I must reform and be a good boy, and make a button-hole for the squire. I wonder he is not painfully reminded of the first day of his thralldom! I would rather be tied up with honest rope than silken threads that get so round a fellow there's no bursting the bonds!"

He opened a little wicket gate that led to the park through a fir plantation for a short distance, and then issued out upon one of the delicious green lawns of Court Garden.

Like a beautiful early butterfly, Mrs. Eagle Bennison was flitting this morning among her flower-beds. The smile and the pearly teeth were, as ever, visible.

"Oh, George, I was wanting you! Come and help me—there's a good fellow. Our servants are all going to the wedding, and they must have each a little nosegay. These forget-me-nots are going off, so we can pick them. The white and blue mixed will be quite sweet, won't they? You know Peterson and the boy have gone to help at the church. Dear Elva and Walter! It quite seems like marrying one's own children, doesn't it? How glad I am that horried Hoel Fenner disappeared! So like a wicked literary man! One never knows about people of that sort, does one?"

"He was handsomer than Walter Akister," said George, stooping down at once and beginning his labors of Hercules over the minute forget-me-nots, and wishing they were guelder roses, so that one each would have amply sufficed for the servants.

"I do so distrust handsome men, the naughty creatures are so apt to be deceitful and to take one in. When I—I mean before I married John I was quite besieged with handsome men, but I said no, I will have worth!"

"Worth how much?" innocently asked George, feeling sure the handsome men had all been poorer than Squire John.

"That, of course, had nothing to do with it. And I have never regretted my choice."

"I should think not. I declare, sweet coz, that it would be difficult to find even a crumpled leaf in your bed of roses."

"What a sweet simile! But of course life has its trials. I think, George, I'll go in and rest. I know you'll see there are ten little nosegays made up ready for the servants. They must start early. You'll drive down with us, won't you?"

"No, thank you, I'll run down quicker on my own legs and take my own time. I had better see the start of the ten pieces of silver—the servants, I mean."

"Oh, thank you! Yes, that will be kind. Here is the white ribbon to tie up the posies."

Mrs. Eagle Bennison flitted away to have a little nap before early luncheon, leaving George Guthrie happily at work in the broiling sun.

"Forget-me-not!" he murmured, pathetically. "Forget-me-not—I'm not likely to if I get a sunstroke or begin to peel during the ceremony."

But being a good fellow, he got interested in his task, taking pride in making each nosegay different. As the house-maid Sarah had a special interest in his eyes because her lover lived in the village and was a "first-rate fellow," he took much trouble in arranging her nosegay as a true-love-knot, the white forget-me-nots outlining the knot.

"How Sally—no, Sarah—will giggle! I would rather stake my hat on her happiness than on that of Elva. By the way, outside the plantation there's some spinolosa, I'll go and get it, and let the servants take it down with them."

Off he rushed presently, after depositing the nosegays in the servants' hall, and without waiting for the thanks which were showered on him by the busy servants.

"One gets a great many thanks for being an idle man," he thought, as he came down the drive toward the Pools, and so plunged down into a great empty dank hollow which lay between the Pools, and which once had been filled with water. Here, in the soft, boggy bank, George Guthrie had discovered a patch of exquisite ferns, and thinking only of the admiration they would call forth, he let himself down by now and then catching hold of a slight stem. All at once he paused in utter amazement, for, sitting in this sunless and melancholy spot was Jesse Vicary,

with folded arms, leaning against the stem of a great fir-tree which rose high above the more coppice-like growth of the hollow.

Jesse was as much surprised as George Guthrie at the unexpected meeting.

"Good heavens!" said this latter. "Why, my dear fellow, you'll damp off for a certainty, if you meditate here! It's enough to give you ague, intermittent fever, and typhoid all at once! I didn't know that— Oh, you've come to see Miss Kestell married?"

Jesse would have given anything to have escaped notice; as it was, he tried to dissemble.

"I've come to get a little change, Mr. Guthrie. I'm going back to-night by the mail, but I'm not much in the mood for weddings."

"Ah!" George was puzzled. Jesse had altered so much—the grand, hopeful expression had left his face. George felt all this, though he was not much able to argue out his feelings.

"Mood for weddings? Nonsense! Neither am I in a mood for this wedding, but we have to make the best of the inevitable. Come along with me, Vicary. I'll give you some luncheon and act courier. If you have had a little misunderstanding with Mr. Kestell, now's the time to make it up. He's kind-hearted at the bottom."

Jesse stood up and leaned against the great red trunk. He looked really ill; his face was hollow and haggard, his eyes were bloodshot from want of sleep.

"I am only waiting at Rushbrook for a last interview with Mr. Kestell," he said in a low voice, for in George Guthrie's presence it was difficult to lose self-control, so much influence have all true-hearted natures. "I am here only for that explanation, not for weddings."

The reason and point of his answer was of course entirely a mystery to Mr. Guthrie, but judging only from the outside man, he could see well enough that something had gone very wrong with Jesse Vicary. Poor fellow, he had heard that he was out of work—perhaps he was in real need. Quite silently George slipped his hand into his pocket; but no, how could he offer money? For a moment George thought whether, if he tried, he could slip some gold pieces into Jesse's pocket unawares; but the experi-

ment was too dangerous. He had not enough legerdemain talent for that.

"I'll tell you what, Vicary, you look very far from well; that makes you see everything through black spectacles. Why, man, for your sister's sake you ought to cheer up. Do me a favor; we are old friends, you know. Come to the wedding with me, and then this evening we will go to Folkestone. I've got to spend a week there to recruit my own health; the very idea of a wedding quite disturbs my equilibrium for a month, and Symee shall come too, and she can find a friend to accompany her." (Yes, these spare guineas would cover expenses fo a week). "You are sure to find work when you go back as sunburned as a plow-boy. Why, now, I don't wonder no one will have you near them."

George Guthrie had spoken very quickly, partly to hide his own confusion and distress, and partly to give Jesse time to recover. It was impossible not to be touched by the warm feeling that prompted all this lively sketch, and Jesse felt it deeply; but he would not trust himself to say more than "Thank you, Mr. Guthrie, it's impossible, quite impossible." Then turning away he was gone before George could follow him.

CHAPTER XVII.

"WILT THOU HAVE THIS MAN?"

St. John's Church only boasted of one bell, and true to the rules of more elaborate music, it was the length of the interval which settled the grave or gay of the occasion. The rope being pulled vigorously, the wedding-bell therefore always sounded as if it were in a great hurry and wished the bride and bridegroom not to keep it too long waiting and ringing.

But use is part of our second nature, and it was only the irreverent stranger who spoke slightingly of the little tinkle.

On this occasion Miss Clara Heaton was very much fussed; it was difficult to be here, there, and everywhere, and more difficult still to keep an eye on Herbert. The crowd had gathered early and swarmed into the church, packing itself considerately like a herring barrel, and making the best of having to wait a long time by various whispered remarks on the floral decorations and small pieces of

information about the bride and bridegroom. To be honest, these remarks were by no means as original as they are often represented by our brilliant novelists when anxious to do justice to uneducated wit. But Rushbrook rustics were not on this high level.

Mrs. Smith, senior, who was fanning herself vigorously with her pocket-handkerchief, as she held Tommy up to see his elders' heads and bonnets, remarked in a loud whisper to Mrs. Tubbs that she hadn't had time to cook the dinner and had hurried away only just eating a dry crust, which was, in her opinion, "a poor substitute for the stomach." 'Liza's mother, who was not well versed in long words, accepted this statement without questioning, and added that she had had a bit before starting, because mother didn't like waiting, but she knew Mrs. Black had only warmed up a potato pie, for Miss Heaton had told her there would be no getting into the church if they were late, and her little Polly was such a trouble, for the doctor said she was cutting her teeth through her brain. This even greater falsification than usual of a poor doctor's remarks on teeth-cutting was received in perfect faith, as that curious physical fact was quite current in Rushbrook.

"There now," whispered Mrs. Smith, beginning to wipe Tommy's face anyhow without regard to the bearings of his features, thereby making him whimper, "I declare Miss Heaton has put off the Mothers' Meeting this afternoon on account of the wedding, but that Mrs. Eagle Bennison wished us to come to Court Garden to-morrow to have a tea and a bit of talking to."

"Mrs. Eagle Bennison," retorted Mrs. Black, "is wonderful with her tongue. She can expound Scripture a deal better than Miss Heaton, who always stops every minute as if she were trying to swallow cherry stones; but Mrs. Eagle Bennison, she is never at a loss like, and can explain every word in the Bible, even the 'i' in badger skin, so as to draw tears from the eyes—that she can."

"Well, now! can she, really?" said Mrs. Smith, who was not given to going to meetings, and was not very partial to the mistress of Court Garden. "She asked me to come to join some society about the 'training of the 'drustial poor,' but my husband says I'm not to go trepassing about meetings; 'tain't respectable, he thinks; but Lor'!

every one does it now, I tell him; he's behind-hand, that he is."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Black. "There's Mr. Heaton coming to tidy up the bits of flowers. No, it ain't, it's Jimmy Johns; his long skirt is fine and quite new."

"That's his hassock," corrected Mrs. Tubbs. "But harkee, they're coming."

"Look, Tommy, your sister is outside a-strewing flowers for the lady to walk on; isn't she a darling?"

The excitement was great within the church, and a slight disappointment was felt by the congregation that they couldn't eat their cake and have it as well; in other words, the crowd within envied the crowd without. One seat on each side next to the entrance had been reserved for the few privileged persons who were to witness both the arrival of the bride and the ceremony in church. These were the servants of Rushbrook House, as of course they would come late on account of their press of work at the bride's home. The little girls that lined the path on each side looked like pink-tipped petals of daisies, and made a very pretty border to the church-yard, with their pink frocks and white hats, and their white baskets filled with white flowers.

As the carriages began driving up, a little flutter of excitement thrilled through the daisies and was communicated to the compact mass behind them. It was a real pleasure to the country folk to see such lovely garments and to witness the bustle and excitement in the various groups that gathered at the gate awaiting the bride's arrival.

Walter Akister had been only too willing to accede to Elva's wish of a quiet wedding. He hated any kind of fuss or publicity, and was only anxious enough to have the whole thing over, so no strangers were to be present, for Elva had positively rejected even the help of her Fitzgerald cousins to see her married. She pleaded her mother's health, and the impossibility of getting any number of people into St. John's. Betta Akister was to be a sort of bride-maid, and was to walk with Amice behind the bride. Mrs. Eagle Bennison had wondered that a rich man like Mr. Kestell was content with such a simple little affair; but then Elva was so spoiled and her father humored her shockingly.

The squire and his wife came driving up just at the right

moment, and were received by Lord Cartmel, who was dreamily answering Miss Heaton's remarks about the sudden heat. He had been brought here by Betta, who stood arrayed in white silk, which color contrasted painfully with her freckled fair face.

Mrs. Eagle Bennison was quite equal to the occasion, and at once made everybody feel more cheerful by the constant display of her pearly teeth.

"Now really, isn't this sweet and rural, Lord Cartmel? So like the simple wishes of our young pair? The little cottage girls are quite models of propriety, I see, and how delightful one's flowers look in those picturesque baskets. Our tiny church is quite charmingly decorated, I hear from George Guthrie. By the way, he ought to be here; naughty fellow, he will be late."

"He helped us with this arch," said Miss Heaton. "He has so much time on his hands that one does not mind asking him to do things. Now I think I shall go into church. One's presence prevents the people behaving irreverently."

"Yes, yes—just so. When I thought out the rules of the T. A. P. S. I also wished to inculcate reverence to all that is above. The poor are so apt to forget it. Now really I think I shall go in too, and here are some more ladies. We had better go in together."

The select company swept in between the rows of pink children and felt that they were partly placed there in their honor.

Poor Betta began to feel very shy and wished heartily the bride would come. It was nearly half past two, and though it is quite correct for a bride to be late, the shy bride-maid did not appreciate being stared at by every one who crowded in. Lord Cartmel, too, was uneasy about his son and the best man, and hoped secretly that he would not be expected to be in any way master of the ceremonies. He had forgotten his own wedding and wished himself back in The Observatory, making experiments with the spectrum.

At last the Rushbrook carriage was seen driving slowly up the steep road, the two policemen began to clear a way in the outside crowd who were not allowed to enter the church-yard, though they of course offered no interference to a gentleman who suddenly hurried in, hardly noticed in the general excitement, and who resolutely forced himself a place near to the church door within the angle formed by

a buttress. He could see here perfectly. Evidently he was not a wedding guest, for he had no favor, and no notice was taken of him. Hoel did not wish to be seen, but he would come here unnoticed if possible, to look once more at the woman whom he loved now above all worldly consideration. He must see her once more. He fancied he could tell if she were happy, if indeed his cruel desertion had killed her love and she had been able to find comfort in Walter's unchanging affection. This was the mad wish that seized him, the wish that made him disregard all else. He saw, but took no heed of the crowd of pink school-children; he heard remarks, but they did not reach his brain. He saw people he knew, but he did not apparently recognize them, and those few minutes of waiting were prolonged in his mind to a long age of intense suffering. There was Walter Akister and his best man stationed close beside him at the church door, but their backs were to him. The last time he had seen Walter was when the cold black water was closing over him. It was a very painful thought that he owed his life to him. In his delirium Sœur Marie had told him he had gone over the scene again and again. Should he in after-years go over this scene. Should he always have that awful feeling of despair, of mute agony, that seemed to weigh him down physically as well as mentally? Was he really the light-hearted Hoel who had first seen this beautiful landscape? He felt he was a very different being, a man who had no interests, who would, after to-day, retire into the outside life of ordinary routine, with no soul in it. For in the long run the study of self becomes very uninteresting, even if that self is out of the common order.

All this came dully before his mind, and then he wondered why he was here, and why he had come to add another torture to his already racked sensations, and all the time he looked with hungry eyes toward the triumphal arch under which Elva would walk.

All at once he saw her, and all the strength he had fancied he possessed forsook him, for it was not the old Elva he gazed at, but a pale reflex of the woman whose face he had traced again and again in his mental vision. Through the thin veil he saw her plainly, and even when she first issued from under the flowery bower, he gazed and gazed again. She was leaning on the arm of her father, they

were walking very slowly, for the little girls in shy delight were scattering their flowers before her feet. Elva had known nothing of this arrangement, and for a moment it seemed to pain her. She even paused an instant, and then, was it the strong attractive power of the electricity of love, or why should she have raised her head, and suddenly turned her eyes straight toward Hoel? Their eyes met. In Elva's look there was mingled the deep reproach of injured love, in Hoel's the saddest and humblest craving for forgiveness that human eyes can express.

Walter Akister had been waiting for the arrival of the bride at the arch, to go into the church, and he was just about to do this, having given a glance down the path, when he too was arrested by Elva's pause. He turned toward her again, and took a few steps in her direction, but nobody noticed him, for all eyes were fixed on the bride.

Her white face suddenly flushed, her whole frame trembled, and so terribly overcome was she that she paused a moment and leaned more heavily on her father's arm. This unexpected stoppage caused Betta to tread on part of the long train which Amice loosely held, and for a second Walter fancied this was the reason of the whole episode.

Then he too was made conscious of that electricity, that thought-wave of which we know so little, but which exists, and turning sharply round in the direction of the bride's eyes, he too saw what had unnerved her—the presence of Hoel Fenner!

"Papa, papa," whispered Elva to her father. "He is there. Do you see him? He has come back. I can not, I can not go on; you said he never would."

Mr. Kestell did not pause to analyze any feeling; he felt like a man who has seen in the near distance the tidal wave rushing toward him ready to ingulf him. He forcibly drew on his child.

"Elva, dearest, recollect yourself. Think of the many eyes upon you. For Heaven's sake, come on! You can not stop now. Look, Walter is awaiting you."

The procession began to move on again. The little girls were not even conscious of a hitch, their individual efforts engrossing them. Even the closely packed onlookers behind them barely realized more than that the Honorable Miss Akister had trodden on the white gown, and that Miss Amice looked scared and dropped the train so that it

swept over the white blossoms, collecting them into ungraceful heaps.

Walter, by rights, should now have been in church, but he cared nothing about appearances, and heeded not the almost audible whisper of his best man to "come on."

His brows knitted and his eyes gleamed with an unnatural look as he glanced from the bride to Hoel Fenner, the veins started in his forehead and the blood rushed to his cheeks, so that Elva and her father were close to him before he recollected that he was in public, that many eyes, even if they were rustic eyes, would now be fixed on him.

"Go in, Walter," murmured Mr. Kestell; his lips were ashy pale.

"Yes, yes. But what business has that fellow here? I will have him turned out. I—"

"It's all right, Akister," again murmured Mr. Kestell. "Go in; you are stopping the way."

"And I will, too, till he is off. Damn the fellow!"

Passion had got the better of him; and Elva, once more pale, gazed in horror at the face of the man she was about to marry.

Even this had happened so quickly that it was difficult for the onlookers to make anything of it. But impatience to follow the bride now caused the cordon of pink girls close to the church door to be broken and the bridal-party were by this means forced forward in confusion. In vain Mr. Kestell waved his disengaged arm and cried: "Keep off!" he was not regarded, so in another second he and Elva, followed by the bride-maids, found themselves with little ceremony walking up the aisle toward the chancel steps, where Mr. Heaton and the archdeacon were waiting to perform the marriage ceremony.

Among the first to force his way in in spite of opposition, was Hoel, only just in time, however, for the policemen, seeing a commotion, now forcibly cleared the entrance and managed to bar the way across the open door.

But no policeman could have stopped Hoel from entering. He had been utterly unconscious of Walter's look of hatred, unconscious of everything but Elva's reproach, a reproach which humbled him to the dust. "Thou art the man!" rang through his ears. "Thou, Hoel Fenner, the irreproachable in thine own sight, thou hast done this thing,

thou hast ruined a woman's life, her faith, her belief. Why complain that thy punishment is heavy?"

But this punishment was not a small thing to him, it was a living death. He could not blame any one but himself, and he could but repeat again and again: "Elva, if you had waited! if— But why should you have waited?"

The marriage service had begun.

The wedding guests were ranged in the front seats, and were conspicuous from their fine clothes. George Guthrie had stepped in, as he thought, rather late, through the vestry door, but taking the end seat in the squire's pew, he waited in some anxiety the appearance of Walter. It surprised him at last when bride and bridegroom seemed suddenly to present themselves at once, and as he turned round he noticed the disturbance at the door.

George, who could see the bride's profile, remarked her pale face, and near to him, the black look and knitted brows of Walter. He could not see Mr. Kestell's face, but evidently the chief actors in the wedding were in a very unusual state of mind.

"Eh, well, what is in the wind now?" thought George, turning over the leaves of his prayer-book in such an absent-minded way that Mrs. Eagle Bennison handed him hers with the right place found, and a look, meaning, "Oh, George! don't you know? it's because you are a bachelor."

George Guthrie glanced at it. "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here," then without paying much more attention to the words again fixed his eyes on the small semicircle round Mr. Heaton.

"Thirdly, it was ordained," said Herbert Heaton's clear voice, "for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to cleave to the other, both in prosperity and in adversity—"

"By Jove! Elva's going to make a fool of herself," thought George, and placed his hands behind him, as if to do away with the sight of the obnoxious service-book. "If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's the marriage service under these circumstances." He would have thought this much more had he known of Hoel's presence at the end of the church.

"Let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

George Guthrie actually opened his lips; but there are many men who wish to say something that is on their minds, but forever hold their peace.

"Good gracious! I nearly made a scene," he thought, with a sigh of intense relief that his better judgment had prevailed.

Of the people most concerned only Elva heard every word of the service now proceeding. Walter felt that Mr. Heaton was confoundedly slow and that he might, for all their sakes, hurry on through this uninteresting service. But each word fell like the sound of a knell on Elva's ears.

It was wonderful she could remain so still, so outwardly immovable, wonderful that she did not do more than clasp her hands very firmly together. She did not believe Hoel was in church, but he had been close beside her; he had come back then. Her father, Amice, and Walter had all said he would never come here again. They had promised she should never, never see him any more, and yet here he was.

She heard, through all her thoughts, that slow knell of words distinctly. Had she no friend here, no one to help her? Was she left quite, quite alone? She suddenly raised her eyes to Herbert Heaton's face, and it seemed to her as if it were the face of an angel, so pure, so good did he look, and so earnest was his tone. She heard with a new hearing, as he slowly repeated:

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful."

Herbert Heaton meant every word he said, and as if to impress this more on her mind, Elva fancied that for an instant he looked at her searchingly. The secrets of all hearts must one day be disclosed, and in her heart there was a lie—she did not love this man, but another; unworthy, cruel he might be, but she had loved him, and with her to love once was to love always. How could she have consented to do this? And now, now it was too late! Before God she was going to utter a lie. How could she?

But then how avoid it? She became suddenly conscious of the hundreds of eyes fixed on her. Cruel, pitiless eyes they seemed to her. She was certain they were looking to see her tell this lie. She saw their impatience and the eagerness in which their owners stretched forward. Was this purgatory? Were they all fiends ready with their shouts of derision? Was she going mad? She clasped her hands tighter. She must steady her thoughts. Herbert Heaton was listening to hear if she would sell her soul for her father's sake. But he too had deceived her. Everybody had deceived her, for Hoel had come back.

The pause ended—and how many thoughts can be flashed through a human brain in a short pause. Herbert Heaton turned toward Walter.

"Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy state of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others keep thee only unto her so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will," answered Walter Akister, in a clear, impatient, fierce voice.

Yes, now it was her turn; the judge was calling upon her for the truth. No, it was Herbert Heaton, Herbert, who, like Amice, had always done his duty, who had nothing to hide, nothing he was ashamed of in his heart. Those two words "I will!" how soon they would be uttered, irrevocably uttered. Her father would bless her—her father. She turned her burning eyes toward him and saw how troubled he looked; the brows were furrowed, the cheeks haggard, he looked years older. Was it true that he was more ill than they knew, and this was his last wish? If so—

"As you will answer at the dreadful day of judgment—" Was Herbert saying this? No, no, not that; but very slowly and solemnly he was asking: "Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honor, and keep him in sickness and in health—"

Could she do this thing? Could she tell this lie? She who prided herself on truth, even for her father's sake? No, no; for his sake, because his name was unsullied—was honorable—she would not.

"So long as ye both shall live?"

There was an awful silence in the church. The congre-

gation all strained their necks and their ears to catch the bride's words, for that was part of the entertainment provided for them. You might have heard a pin drop, but the figure in white with the thin veil falling about her in softest folds never stirred, only the hands were clasped tightly, and the lips firmly closed.

Herbert Heaton bent a little toward her, and fancying she was nervous, whispered:

"Say, 'I will.'"

Walter, too, turned toward her; love seemed strangely akin to hate, as he too whispered:

"Elva, speak. Do you understand?"

Her lips moved, she felt as if she were turning to stone, petrified by the countless eyes that were upon her. She heard the rustle of Mrs. Eagle Bennison's mauve silk dress. She felt Amice come close up to her and whisper her name. She saw her father make a step toward her, with speechless terror written on his face, and then again the words rang out clearly:

"As you will answer at the dreadful day of judgment."

She must, God helping her, give that answer.

No one word had ever before so electrified the congregation of St. John's on the Moor, as Elva's "No," which, if low, was startlingly, clearly enunciated.

"What nonsense!" muttered Walter. "Heaton, go on, I tell you, go on!" He made as if he would forcibly take one of her clasped hands, but only Herbert Heaton saw this. He placed himself gently between them.

"Do you mean this 'no'?" he whispered, trying even now to shield her if she had made a mistake. "Are you sure? Do you remember what you are doing?"

But the strain had been too great. The eyes appeared to her to dart out of their sockets like a hundred flashes of cruel lightning, the crowd of grinning demons seemed to close her in, she wanted to repeat the words "Before God," but she felt tongue-tied, and without a sound she fell fainting upon Amice.

The scene of confusion that followed can scarcely be described. Every person started as if to get out of their seats and come to the rescue, but George Guthrie was ready at once with his commands.

"Keep back, keep back, please! The bride has only fainted. She will recover in a few moments." He was

by her side, and lifting her in his strong arms before any one had quite recovered from the shock of surprise, and with the help of Mr. Heaton, they carried her quickly to the vestry, Amice following, and several other ladies also. Mr. Kestell looked for a moment quite bewildered, as if he did not the least understand what had taken place, till the shy Betta suddenly, with compassion, whispered:

"They are looking after her, Mr. Kestell, it will be all right. She will be soon better. Won't you sit down, or—"

Mr. Kestell looked up at her, then round at the excited crowd that was standing up, and covered his face with his hands.

"Is this shame," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "public shame? Oh, it is dreadful!"

"No, no," said Betta, not understanding what he could mean. "She will come out again, and the service will be finished."

Mr. Kestell shook his head, then cast another glance at the people, and hurried suddenly away through the choir and on toward the vestry.

The poor people whispered, even spoke audibly, much to Miss Heaton's distress. She rose up, and turning toward the crowd, shook her head vigorously, and held up her finger, but the catastrophe was altogether too great to be received mutely. Suddenly George Guthrie came quickly out of the vestry, and facing the people, he said, in his kind voice:

"My friends, go home quietly. Miss Kestell is not well, the wedding will not take place to-day."

Then going down to Miss Heaton, he said:

"We are taking her to the vicarage; will you go and help Amice?"

The congregation clattered out as if the church were on fire; the truth was, they themselves were burning to tell somebody. In a few minutes the building was empty of all except one man, who was crouching against the wall in the last seat.

"Oh, God!" he said, kneeling down, and hiding his face. "I shall have to go through the agony again! A man can die more than once even here!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

VENGEANCE!

How long Hoel stayed in the little church he could not tell. No one came to disturb him; the door remained opened, and the sudden gusts of winds that now and then swept up through the pine plantation only blew in a few of the crushed petals of the white flowers that the bride had not trodden on again.

All the mental suffering he had experienced, added to the physical weakness which still remained, made him only able to bear his utter misery by thus resting in this perfect solitude. He did not fully realize that the wedding had been arrested by Elva herself; he believed that she had been too much overstrained to go through with it, and that the next day, or as soon as she had sufficiently recovered, she would finish the ceremony. He now began blaming himself for having come again. He had behaved selfishly, and what right had he even to come and beg for her forgiveness, even if it had been merely by a look.

Hoel was again thrown into a state of penitence, and recognized that unselfishness is not acquired in a day, nor even after having experienced a great shock. He began also to writhe under the idea that by showing himself he had but added, in her eyes, to his former cowardly conduct. How should he ever be able to explain to her that his intention had been, this time at least, good and honorable? He fancied he should be content to see her the wife of another, if only she could know that his conduct had had much excuse.

"But how can she ever know this? How can I ever tell her?"

Suddenly Hoel raised his head and recalled his resolution. After the wedding he had promised to tell Jesse the truth. He might even now be trying to see Mr. Kestell, and—No, that must not be! Already, to spare Elva, and therefore himself, he had too long put off what was right. Jesse ought to know, and he, Hoel, was the only man who might influence him. On the other hand, Hoel could not make up his mind to leave this spot without first finding out whether Elva were better. He looked at his watch, it was

nearly half past four. He must find Jesse before going back to town. Poor fellow! he had been wronged by every one.

"He looked to me as a friend, and I have behaved as no friend should have done."

He stood up and felt stronger and calmer. Deep down in his heart there was the thought that Elva was not yet another man's wife; but he wondered how he could draw comfort from such a poor source of hope. Two or three days at the most, and the same ghastly scene would be re-enacted. Anyhow, he would be a man now; he would put away thoughts about himself, and face life and all its emptiness as best he could.

Vicary had been able to find some outside sphere in which to throw himself out of himself. That seemed the great motive power of men whose lives were mysteries to the worldly and easy going.

"If I can't get up to his exalted state of feeling, at least I can try the working part of the affair. After all, can I honestly say that I have been happy all these years? I have lived happily, but is that happiness? What is happiness? But that other thing, I must not put it off any longer. Elva is not yet away. Ought I to consider that? Have I not done that too long already? Fate is too strong for me. Anyhow, I must see Vicary."

He stepped out of the church, and looked round cautiously, almost fearfully, as a prisoner just released from jail might do; but all was silence. The path was strewn with crushed and much soiled flowers. All the rustics had walked over them. No pink-dressed girls were there, no smart carriages, nothing of all the show remained, except the arch, and its flowers were already withering.

No one was about. He could not see the vicarage, and in its shrubbery, which joined the church-yard, no sound was audible. He longed intensely to know something of Elva, but how could he show himself? Here he was, he must be, looked upon as a scoundrel, whom perhaps even Herbert Heaton would pass by without notice.

This idea was maddening to one of Hoel's nature, and caused him to walk quickly out of the little arbor, to plunge into the deep heather up toward Mr. Joyce's cottage.

He would get his duty over and leave Rushbrook for-

ever. The stormy clouds had not increased, and a refreshing breeze had sprung up, and restored a little of his strength. Before he reached the cottage, happily for him, he met Joe, 'Liza's brother, who was much too shy to do anything but answer questions.

"Is Mr. Vicary at your house still?"

"Yes, sir—leastways—" Joe touched his cap and stared.

"Is he there now?"

"No, sir—leastways—"

"Do you know anything about him?" said Hoel, impatiently, not having George Guthrie's power of getting everything and anything out of the rustic mind.

"Mr. Vicary was at home ten minutes ago. He just did up his things, he did, as he's going back to Lunnon to-night; he's not coming here again."

"Where is he?"

"He was going to Rushbrook House, he said, sir, and then would walk on to Greystone. He warn't coming here no more."

"Then I can, perhaps, catch him up," said Hoel, a sudden inexplicable fear seizing him.

Joe looked Mr. Fenner up and down, and grinned. The idea of his catching up Mr. Vicary seemed quite out of the question.

"He walks fast, he does."

"Thank you," said Hoel, understanding perfectly, but not in a mood to be amused, as he would have been at another time. He turned at once, and hurried down the hill as fast as he could. The forest land had once more become as it usually was, solitary and silent. Though the storm had not come on, yet all the sky was overcast, a gray curtain shutting in the beautiful blue. There was an intense melancholy look even in Nature. It was all in harmony with the deep depression which would seize upon him as he hurried on to find Jesse.

"We can go back together," he thought. "I must set about helping him. He has too much power to be allowed to lie hidden for long, but how will he take this news, poor fellow? I wish I were a hundred miles off; but it's no use thinking of it any longer. By telling him I may induce him to be generous. He is generous—a noble-hearted fellow at the bottom, till he took the craze. I

ought to have got that out of his head long ago. But he would never have believed me without going into the whole matter."

Suddenly he paused. There were Rushbrook chimneys. How beautiful it all looked now. Could he have the courage to enter that gate again? Yes, he must. Of course Mr. Kestell would not be at home, and Jesse might be waiting in the study. It was tiresome that he had not overtaken him. He reached the road close by the bridge, and looked round again. He positively dared not open the swing-gate of the drive, but instead he walked on in the opposite direction from the Pools, hoping Jesse might come out. This road took a turn which hid Rushbrook House and then ran by a little dell-like plantation with the mill-stream and tall hedge on one side, and oaks and larches on the other.

With sunlight falling aslant, this part of the road was lovely; now it looked gloomy and dull. Hoel again paused and looked back. At this instant he heard the sound of a vehicle being driven very quickly. He moved on one side, near the steep bank of the stream, and instinctively began to walk on. He was afraid now of being recognized. It was a dog-cart; he heard there were only two wheels, and from force of habit, he glanced quickly at it as it passed him. That glance was enough for mutual recognition. It was Walter Akister, with a groom by his side. The look of fierce hatred that flashed into Akister's eyes was unmistakable, and before Hoel had decided what to do, Walter had thrown the reins to the groom, and telling him to drive on, he sprung down, and, whip in hand, in a moment was by Hoel's side.

"You here again?" he cried, mad with passion. "I wonder you dared to show your face. You are beneath the notice of a gentleman, and deserve the treatment of the brute. Take that, and that, you blackguard!"

Hoel had only time, so quick had been Walter Akister's movements, to make a spring forward and try to wrench the whip out of his enemy's hand. He failed, and, stung with the pain, he closed with Walter, merely, however, in self-defense. He could not otherwise have laid a finger on him. But, though it has been asserted that "a certain man with a guilty conscience once bore a horsewhipping with a due humility," Hoel did not reach this pitch of

perfection. His conscience was self-accusing, certainly, but not in the way that Walter imagined. Alas! right and might are not synonymous terms. Hoel, was not by any means strong enough to cope with Walter, and this young man's blood was up. In another moment Walter had once more struck him, and in the hand-to-hand struggle, Hoel was thrown down. As he fell, he struck his head against a great way-side mile-stone and for a few minutes was dazed by the blow.

Walter did not even wait to see what happened; he merely strode on, and the next turn soon hid him from sight. He had, as he fancied, relieved his feelings. In truth, he had but raised the devil, and whatever the phrase may mean there are but too many proofs that a man may be so completely blinded by anger that his actions become no longer such as he can control.

Hoel did not know how long he remained lying on the brink of the ditch. When he regained his power of thinking, the blood rushed back to his cheeks as he remembered the indignity of his assault. He laid hold of the mile-stone, and raised himself up, but he had to rest again before framing a plan. His head throbbed painfully, and after another interval he walked on a few paces to a spot where the stream was easily reached. Here he dipped his handkerchief in and bathed his temples.

It was only at this moment that he recollected his previous intention of finding Jesse. He might be too late, for this latter might have started already for Greystone. No, that was not likely; he would almost certainly have taken this road.

The need for action is the best cure for soothing tumultuous thought, and Hoel once more turned his steps toward Rushbrook.

He looked at his watch. It was nearly six o'clock. The clouds were lower and more threatening, the air was close, and to Hoel's mind the sadness of the country seemed realized on this evening to its fullest extent. Elva and he had one day argued about the disadvantages and advantages of country life, and Hoel remembered having said that on some days and in some conditions of weather, the oppressive melancholy of the country beats description. He remembered Elva's very look as she answered that she had never experienced oppressive melancholy, only a sadness

that was not without a compensating charm. From this he had first realized that a woman's mind has naturally much of the poet's analyzing power in it, its vibrations are more numerous, and therefore more capable of finer perception. He had rather enjoyed following out this theory, but at the time it had not made him put womankind on a higher pedestal because of their near relationship to poets; on the contrary, fond as Hoel was of all literature as such, he did not rank poetry very much higher than prose, and for this he could have given very forcible and well-explained reasons.

How curious that such a small thing as this should come into his head now! he thought, when the day had been one filled with a great event. How incomprehensible was man's mind, both in its power of soaring and its inability to resist the influence of small things. Pshaw! There he was again, wandering on about theories when all his mind ought to be centered on what he meant to say to Jesse Vicary. That was the important fact of the moment. It was that confounded blow that made him so stupid.

He was in sight again of the swing gate. The gray light made it seem more like late evening than the hour warranted. The road by the Pools was soon lost in the light and on account of the overshadowing trees whose green had already lost their fresh greenness.

There was no Vicary in sight. What should he do? He passed his thin white hand over his forehead to ease the throbbing, and to force himself to be definite. Would there be any chance of meeting Mr. Kestell? He, Hoel, had nothing to fear from him, for there was no secret between them. Besides, was he not coming for his sake?

Suddenly he swept away all reasoning, walked up to the swing gate, and entered the drive.

How beautiful it all looked! The lawn was the perfection of green velvet, the copper beech and the clump of silver birch could not but claim admiration in all lights, flower-beds were in their prime—all that money could do was found here in its best conception.

But there was a strange stillness about the place. The gardeners, who had had a holiday given to them, had naturally absented themselves after the unfortunate ending of the service. The guests had made themselves scarce of course, and it appeared that those who had to remain on

duty were anxious not to obtrude their presence. So Hoel settled. He himself could not walk up the drive unmoved. The strange events that had happened since his last visit here had produced too serious consequences to allow him to dispel all the miserable recollections that crowded his brain.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by the sound of a foot-fall in front of him. He looked up and saw a figure coming down the steps of the front door. For one instant his heart bounded and his pulses throbbed. The figure was all in white. He fancied he was going to find himself face to face with Elva. Then another glance showed him his mistake. It was her sister.

Amice having made three steps forward, stopped short, and gazed fixedly at Hoel. For a moment she had hoped he was another, but when she recognized him she did not appear surprised.

She too had seen him in the morning. Mechanically Hoel walked straight on till he stood close beside her.

"Tell me," he said, without any introduction, "how she is. If I knew *that* I could go away happier. You will not believe me, no one will, when I say that now I only wish to see her happy." He spoke very low, and he could not prevent himself from imagining all the evil Amice must be thinking of him. Her blue penetrating eyes were fixed on his face, but their expression made him insensibly shudder and remember the strange hints people had thrown out as to Amice Kestell being somewhat uncanny.

"Elva is very unwell. She is still at the vicarage. Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful! Mamma feels it so much, but I came back here to find papa. Have you seen him, Mr. Fenner?"

"No; I suppose he is still at the vicarage."

Hoel was much surprised that Amice did not seem to regard him in the light of a villain. He remembered their interview in the wood. Perhaps, then, she alone was capable of believing that he had had a reason, if a wrong one, for forsaking Elva. The thought made him feel grateful to her.

He added, with a new tone in his voice:

"Amice, for pity's sake, tell me that I had nothing to do with that—interruption! Listen: I only wanted to see her once again, the wish was too strong to resist. I be-

lieve if I had been on my death-bed, I should have risen and come here to-day. Will she think it another sign of my vileness? The idea is unbearable!"

"What do your feelings matter?" said Amice, with a force that staggered him. "Don't you know, Mr. Fenner, that we individuals are nothing, mere nothings, in the hand of God; that He works out His ways by our means, that is all? The curse was bound to fall for the sin. He deals out justice, but, oh! He is very merciful too, very merciful! You know—the cause. Look, because one poor, feeble human being can help another, I ask you for your help now."

Never before had words acted so powerfully on Hoel. The very depth of his heart was stirred with pity. Never before had he recognized his own nothingness in the great world of creation. What, indeed, as Amice said, were his feelings? Was he not but one of the million of sufferers through sin? Was he not as much in need of mercy as any other, and was not his only birthright the power of doing good? That power he had never exercised in an appreciable quantity, but instead he had set himself up as a ruler and a judge over his fellow.

At this moment, weak as he was, Hoel Fenner would have worn a penance sheet, had Amice bidden him to do so. What if she were, after all, a woman far beyond the ordinary level of womankind, a woman who believed with a true belief in the retributive justice of God?

"Tell me what to do. What is it you fear? By my love, my unalterable love for Elva, let me be of use, dear Amice!"

"You forsook us before," she said, sadly, and Hoel's soul was filled with shame. It needed Amice's words to bring him to the full consciousness of his cowardice.

"Yes, and I have suffered for it."

"I am not blaming you," she said, sadly, covering her eyes. "It was natural; you know the curse—I have partly unraveled it, only partly. You know all, help me. Is Jesse Vicary to be feared?"

"Feared? Jesse Vicary, at the bottom the noblest of men—but now he has a craze—a false idea. It was to set that right that I came here again. Has he been here? I was waiting to see him."

"He has been here, and I have seen him. He was

changed. He looked so dreadful! You are a man of the world, you do not believe that the devils can do us harm—but yet I saw it so plainly. Jesse was not himself. When he heard my father had gone out, he was furious with him, he frightened me. I do not know why papa broke his word; he had promised to meet him here at six o'clock. Jesse Vicary came at five minutes before, and papa had gone out half an hour before, Jones said so. He left the vicarage to see after mamma, he told us. Do you see how I am placed? I dare not leave the house, manima will not be left for long, she is so much upset about Elva. I dare not go after the others, but, oh! Mr. Fenner, I am so anxious. Will you follow Vicary? He can not be very far. It is not more than five minutes since he left this spot."

Hoel was immediately seized with the same dread. What he had feared might happen. Jesse would perhaps say things he might regret all his life from want of knowing the truth.

"I will follow Vicary at once. Do you think he went by the Pools?"

"Yes, I know he did. I watched him. But I do not know where my father is. Not there, not there, I hope; but it would comfort me to think you would be on the watch."

"I will bring him home," said Hoel, earnestly, taking Amice's hand, which was icy cold. "One thing more. If you know the truth, promise me to spare Elva."

Amice turned her eyes full upon him.

"I do not know the whole truth," she said. "No one has ever told me. I only know that God's laws can not be broken without the punishment following unto the third and fourth generation. But go now; go at once for Elva's sake."

Hoel turned away, and was soon lost to sight when he had passed over the bridge.

CHAPTER XIX.

BY THE POOLS.

Hoel was lifted out of himself now. How could he be otherwise when he found that a mere girl could be so full of courage even when weighed down with a mysterious certainty of evil that had to be atoned for? Hoel had often

resisted this doctrine which he looked upon as out of the natural order of certainty which ruled the world, but now he seemed brought face to face with it and the mantle of dread seemed to fall likewise over him, though even now he apologized to himself for his unusual superstition.

Apart from all this, Jesse ought to have been found before; why should he relentlessly pursue Mr. Kestell because his own brain was clouded by an overmastering idea? But how dared *he* ask any reason why—he who had cowardly run away from the problem as if to expiate his past fault. Hoel hurried on, forgetting all his previous suffering. He noted as he passed along the broken reflections on the troubled water, the grasses and flags that turned their whiter sides as they bent before the wind, the broken-off twigs and leaves that floated or gyrated on the water. Hoel noted all this because his eyes looked here and there expecting to see Jesse leaning against some tree watching for the return of the master of Rushbrook.

But the first Pool was silent except for the thousand voices of nature, for the splash of the moor-hen as she scuttled along by the reedy margin, for the sudden darting out of her hiding-place of some other bird, or the scamper of a red squirrel. To Hoel all this was only silence, for he had as yet learned to recognize the signs of man alone, not those of nature.

He paused at the head of the Pool, uncertain what to do. He feared to miss what he sought for, not being sure Jesse was here. He who knew every turn and twist, every tiny path and track, was not very likely to be walking demurely up and down the road. After a brief debate with himself Hoel settled he would go beyond the second Pool as far as where the road branched off to the Tarn. Here he must of necessity wait, as, from one or other of these roads, Mr. Kestell or Jesse were sure to return home.

There was an interval before the second Pool was reached—a small stream connected the two—a bridge and a road ran in a transverse direction here, but the road only led to Court Garden.

On reaching the second Pool Hoel was somewhat puzzled. After this the road was not so close to the water, and there was in some parts a copse-like portion of land bordering the Pool.

All these trees added to the gathering gloom; and Hoel,

again pausing to listen, felt an unusual shrinking from penetrating further down this special bit of road; still he had not yet reached the spot where the turn came leading to the Home Farm, and he had settled himself to go as far as that. He began walking slowly on again, his pulses throbbed painfully, throbbed all the more because he tried to force himself to be calm; it was merely, he said, that blow on his temple that had unnerved him, that, and all he had gone through. But the past must be forgotten, the making up his mind about Jesse Vicary was the closing scene, after that—the deluge of the commonplace in which many a man has voluntarily drowned himself after life's fitful fever had brought down his hopes to zero.

There was a sound on his left hand, a crashing of smaller branches, the swish of those that bounded back to their original position, and in another moment Jesse Vicary, the man he was looking for, stood before him. Now Hoel had come here to find him and was expecting him, but in spite of this he was utterly taken by surprise and drew back a step. Jesse was taller, broader than Hoel. The old consciousness of being in a kind of way commanded by him, asserted itself at once as of old; this time an attempt to resist the influence because of its unsuitableness did not accompany the feeling.

Jesse had the green background behind him, and the little light that fell aslant from above the trees scarcely served to show his expression, but the little of it Hoel noticed made him at once understand Amice's fear.

"I was lying down here close by the water," began Jesse, as if this were quite the most natural statement he could make, "and I saw him, I feel sure I saw him, at the upper end of the Pool. You know, Mr. Fenner, where the ground slopes to the water's edge. He never thought I should be waiting for him here; he fancied he would escape me again; but no, now it is impossible. Come with me if you will, and be a witness. You at least know that I have borne it all long enough in silence. But perhaps you can condone it. I do not want your presence."

He turned sharply round and strode on toward the head of the Pool, which, though visible close to the water where Jesse had been lying, was not so from this part of the road.

"Vicary, stop! stop, for God's sake!" cried Hoel, start-

ing forward to try and overtake him. "You are mad! you are—"

But Joe had been right; it was impossible for Hoel—certainly in his present condition—to overtake the country-bred Jesse. He gave it up and walked as quickly as was possible after him.

"The fellow is mad! He will insult Mr. Kestell; he will— Fool that I have been not to have taken measures sooner!"

A dreadful fear seized him that Jesse, in his evidently overtaxed condition, would be tempted to lay hands on the old man; but no, surely that was impossible—at the bottom this fellow was a gentleman; he would not attack a defenseless old man. The bare idea, however, induced him to try to run, but this made his head reel; he relapsed into a quick walk till at last he turned the bend and stood in sight of the upper portion of the Pool—for here the copse ceased, and only stony and broken ground sloped gently toward the water.

A rapid glance showed him something unexpected. The light was clearer here; no trees intercepted the dull gray sky except the hilly ground on either side, but just above the Pool on the opposite side the slender larch-trees were swayed by the wind and looked like nodding plumes, while through the taller fir-trees swept the long sobbing moan peculiar to these trees. Hoel saw all this as one sees the background of a striking picture. On the bank was the figure of Mr. Kestell. He was half supporting his head on the serpent-like roots of a solitary fir-tree and half on a gray bowlder. That was all Hoel saw except that Jesse Vicary, standing within a few feet of Mr. Kestell, suddenly strode back and met Hoel.

He seized his arm.

"He is there—there—and he is ill; come and do something for him. How can I, with—with the thoughts in my heart—make haste!"

"He has fallen," stammered Hoel, obeying the strong grasp; "see that big bowlder, Vicary. We must lift him up and carry him home."

"I—I—touch him!" said Jesse, in a hoarse voice. "Carry him! I wanted—"

A sudden idea flashed into Hoel's brain—a mad idea. For a few minutes he had not had Jesse in sight, in that

time had he—? He shook off Jesse's hand as if it burned him.

"Why did you not raise him up before?" he gasped out.

"I have only this moment gone near enough," said Jesse. "I have been dazed, I think; for several minutes I could not approach. It was because— Oh, Mr. Fenner, all the words I wanted to say were burning my heart and brain, and then I saw he could not hear them. I think I lost my senses for a moment."

They were close by him now; but it was Hoel who walked up close to the prostrate man, and, kneeling down, called him by name.

"Mr. Kestell, are you much hurt?"

There was no answer.

"Vicary," said Hoel, in an angry, passionate voice, "come here! Can't you be a man at least, and help me to lift him? I have been ill and have very little strength left."

"I—I lift him?" said Jesse, still in a dazed voice, though he came a step nearer. "Those words are still ringing in my brain. I wanted him to give me justice, bare justice, that was all. You would have been witness."

"Fool!" muttered Hoel, "help me to lift him, I tell you; or, better, see, didn't I tell you so, he slipped and has cut his head; see here is the blood on the stone. Run and dip this handkerchief in the water; perhaps he had better lie flat till he recovers consciousness."

Jesse obeyed, and Hoel nervously undid the old man's neck-tie and tried to feel the pulse of the chill left hand.

"Oh, God! Elva!" said Hoel. "But he is not alone now; we are here—that was providential—we must carry him home; he will recover from this faint in a moment."

Jesse now returned with the soaked handkerchief and another supply in his hat. Hoel took the handkerchief, but rejected the other.

"No, this is enough; he is very cold, but he is only in a faint, I am sure of it. I am a little of a doctor; his pulse is feeble, but—but—" Hoel paused; he passed the wet handkerchief gently over the forehead, across which one lock of gray hair had been blown by the wind. There was no sign of recovery. Hoel rose from his cramped position, and as he began taking off his coat he faced Jesse, who stood by, horror-struck and pale, still holding his hat through which the water slowly permeated.

"Look here, Vicary, we must do something. If he hit himself severely the injury may be greater than we think. I know this man is your enemy; but what is the use of your religion if it does not make you forgive!"

"I can forgive my enemy," said Jesse, "but not my—" Hoel interrupted him.

"This is no time for explanation; it is a case, or it may be, a case of life and death. Mr. Kestell has injured you, Jesse, deeply injured you, but, I swear it, not as you think —far worse; still, I thought Christianity—"

"Far worse? How?" said Jesse, hoarsely. "Tell me what can be worse?"

Hoel made a pillow of his coat and laid it very gently under Mr. Kestell's head as he answered, looking round to see that they were alone.

"I tell you this is not the time for the truth. I was waiting about Rushbrook to tell you, but you have no pity; you will— What matter now, who will listen to you? Mr. Kestell defrauded you when you were children."

"Of what?" Jesse, pale as the pale form lying before him, sunk down on his knees. "Mr. Fenner, for pity's sake, tell me the truth!—of what? of our rights to carry his—"

"Nonsense! Of what would have made you independent of every one—of your money—of your father's name?"

"My father's name? It was surely, yes—why should I not say it even here, though he is unconscious—my father's name was Kestell of Greystone."

"Jesse, you are going mad! My poor fellow, quick! take his hand and warm it! Leave the explanation, leave it all till afterward. But if you will have it then, it was no such thing; your father's name was John Pellew, my cousin—"

"And my mother?"

"Was his wife. But it was all the same as far as poor John went. Had he lived he would have owned you even if— But—I— It was all right. Gently! Is it getting warm? Oh, God! oh, God! forgive him! Jesse, think of his wife and children, and how he loved them."

Jesse was indeed warming the cold white hand in his; nay, more, he bowed himself low over it, and suddenly sobbed like a child.

"Mr. Fenner, why did he not tell me this? Was it only

that—of my money—money—only that?—he might have had it all—all. I would have given him every penny to have been spared these months and these thoughts. Tell me, is this my punishment—is this an accident? Am I—merciful God! spare me! am I his murderer?"

"Hush, hush! Jesse, be a man! We must act now," said Hoel, deeply moved, but horrified at the last sentence; he knew it echoed a faint thought in his own mind, a thought he resolved should never be disclosed to any one. "And look here: if you forgive, do further—spare those he loved—say nothing."

"If I forgive?" said poor Jesse. "Tell me what to do; he must live to forgive me. I accused him of this base thing. Aye, he did love his wife, I know it, but I was mad. Tell me, if you are weak, I have strength enough left. I will carry him home single-handed."

He tried to put his arm under the white head without disturbing him too much.

"Wait. I remember now; idiot that I am, I had forgotten! I have a flask of brandy. So put your arm under his head while I pour down a few drops."

Once more Hoel stood up; and it was now Jesse who made his arm the resting-place of that venerable-looking head while the former undid his flask and poured some of the brandy into the silver cup. As he did so he trod on something which caused him to trip. He looked down instinctively, then quickly stooped and picked up something which he slipped in his pocket.

It was done so quickly that even Jesse did not notice it; he was looking at Mr. Kestell's face.

"Have I lifted him enough? Give it to him slowly, Mr. Fenner; he is getting very cold. I will put my coat over him directly you have given him the brandy. Say there is hope."

Jesse was pleading like a child for the verdict.

Hoel did not answer; he hastily poured the brandy down, and to his relief Mr. Kestell opened his eyes and seemed to rouse himself from the state of coma he had appeared to be sinking into. His eyes at once rested upon Jesse, who was still chafing the clammy, cold hand, and he was certainly able to recognize him for a look of intense pain passed over his face and he tried to speak.

"Forgive me! forgive me!" cried Jesse. "I have

wronged you deeply! If you were afraid of what I might think about that other thing—that money—you were mistaken; whatever it was, Mr. Kestell, it is yours, yours; never mention it again; only you must live. Think of those who love you! Can you hear me, sir, can you understand?"

"Hush, Jesse, we must do something at once," said Hoel, in a strained voice. "We must take Mr. Kestell home."

Mr. Kestell could evidently understand, for a strange surprised expression came over his face; he feebly raised his right hand and tried to find something in his pocket.

"He wants to say something," said Jesse. "Mr. Fenner, help him!"

Hoel did so. His pocket contained two letters, one directed to J. Vicary, and the other a blue envelope on which was written "My last will. To be given to J. Vicary."

Mr. Kestell fixed his eye on Jesse.

"Is he to have this letter—and this?" asked Hoel.

The old man's face expressed unutterable relief, his lips moved. Jesse bent down toward him and listened.

"Forgive," the word was more framed than uttered—then another effort, his strength seemed to be sinking. "Restitution!"

Before the words were finished the eyes closed and he was seized with a slight convulsion which contracted the lower limbs.

"Jesse, quick! we must not lose another moment. We must carry him home; we must summon medical aid at once. It is not far, there may be time to save him."

"To save him?" said Jesse, bewildered.

They lifted him between them, and happily Jesse's superior height and strength now told, otherwise Hoel unaided could never have carried Mr. Kestell even this short distance.

The gray clouds seemed closer to earth now, for the evening had drawn in before its time. The gusts of wind swept up the valley more frequently, and as he was borne along, the gray hair of the sick man was now and then blown hither and thither.

"If only we can get in unobserved," murmured Hoel, thinking of Amice on the watch for him. "It will be a ter-

rible shock for his family to see him brought home in this state."

As it happened, when they reached Rushbrook no one was about; the house looked desolate, forsaken, as, passing across the bridge, they entered the drive. No Amice was on the steps, no servants were about in the hall.

"It is best so," said Hoel. "This way, Jesse; come and lay him in the drawing-room while I run and tell Jones."

They laid him gently down on the sofa, and then Hoel went off to send a man on horseback to Greystone for Dr. Pink, and another to the vicarage in case he might be there, and Jesse was left alone with Mr. Kestell. He did all he could think of to restore animation, but nothing availed, and at last he started again to his feet to see if he could find any restorative near at hand, when a side door gently opened and Amice's voice rang out clearly and terribly:

"Papa! papa!"

This time it was no vision. Her father lay there with one hand hanging down and with ashy face and closed eyes. Almost at the same moment Jones and some more terrified servants ran in followed by Hoel.

The latter went up to her at once.

"Amice, this is no place for you; go to your mother and tell her your father is ill. Doctor Pink has been sent for."

"It has come at last," she said. "What can we do?"

He led her away and returned to the sofa. In his agony of remorse, which was all the more terrible because it was now silent, Jesse, kneeling on the floor, was holding the master of Rushbrook House in his arms.

When Hoel came up he noticed a great change; then came another convulsion that shook the whole frame as if it were a wind-moved aspen leaf before its final separation from the parent stem.

Then Hoel knelt down too and listened: he felt the pulse, fetched a small ornamental mirror from the table—on which Elva had once painted a piece of yew with its red berries—and held it to Mr. Kestell's lips. No blur of slightest breath dimmed the bright surface. Hoel knew it was all over.

"The effect was terribly swift—but painless," he said to himself. "It is over; the truth can not help any one now.

If Pink does not find it out it shall remain a secret. Man's judgment, even on himself, is less merciful than God's. If he had only waited and told Jesse the truth; if— And now— Poor Elva! my poor darling!—am I, even I, guiltless of this?"

The door opened and Dr. Pink entered. He took immediate steps to restore animation. "In suspended action of the heart," he said, "even when life appears extinct, hope must not be given up."

CHAPTER XX.

THE TENSION OVER.

ELVA lay motionless in the darkened spare room at the vicarage. Dr. Pink had administered a sleeping draught, but it had not had the desired effect on her overstrained nerves. On coming to herself she had refused to see any one, even her father; she only begged to be left entirely alone till she must return home.

As she lay there her mind gradually took in a truer view of her actions. She felt keenly how the world would speak of her, how she would be scorned, and how Walter would be pitied; but now she had once said no she was resolved that nothing would again make her say yes. Frightened and crushed as she was, she yet sighed with a feeling of great relief. Her heart bounded with the thought that she was free, free of that black nightmare. How could she have been so weak before, even for her father's sake?

The human mind is so infinitely complex that it will try to deceive itself even when such a deceit seems childish. For instance, deep down in her heart Elva knew it was the sight of Hoel that had worked this new strength in her. She told herself it was no such thing, that he was nothing to her now, and never could be; that his conduct had been base and cowardly, inexplicable, and that now no explanation could replace him in her estimation; but all the same it was the sight of his pleading face that had made her say "No!"

"Passing the love of woman," says Holy Writ; but this woman's love seemed part of her very nature; the winds and the sunshine of the moors had woven it into her very being, and in trying to go against her nature she had tried to do the impossible.

As she lay there she thought too of her father; she had not dared see him; she feared to witness his disappointment, but she also felt sure that the next morning she would go to him and lay her cheek against his and beg for his forgiveness. He had never in all her life used a hard word toward her, he would not do so now when others would be speaking of her with scorn. Yet Elva shrunk from this scorn even here in this darkened room; she was her father's daughter in that. It seemed so impossible to be called dishonorable, and yet would not the whole neighborhood cut her for this conduct?

"Papa will protect me," she thought, raising herself up, for sleep would not come; "it was for his sake I tried to marry Walter, and surely he will tell people that. Amice too will be good to me; Amice, who has always chosen the better way; she would have done right at once and would never have got herself into this difficulty. Dear George Guthrie, even he tried to warn me. How can I face them all again? It is dreadful!"

As she sat up she heard steps hurrying outside her door —the tread of many feet. How strange! She had begged to be left quiet. She looked toward the door and listened again. It was Mr. Heaton's voice and George Guthrie's, and Miss Heaton was answering their remarks. Was anything the matter? She gazed round the room and saw nothing but white drapery. Her wedding-dress had been taken off, and she was lying wrapped up in Miss Heaton's dressing-gown, which was much too small for her. Suddenly the door opened and Miss Heaton entered; but Elva was conscious the two men remained close by.

"Elva, my dear, I am sorry to disturb you; but Herbert and Mr. Guthrie think that—"

"What?" said Elva, starting up and getting off the bed.

"That you ought to know. It is quite against my wish, for I think a quiet time for reflection would be the best thing for you in your present excited state; but—"

"Say it at once," said Elva, beginning to tremble, she knew not why.

"Elva, come down at once," George called out. "Your father is ill; I know it is kinder to tell—you are wanted."

"Papa!" she gasped.

"How can she come? She has no dress. Will you have one of mine?"

"Thank you, but I could not get into it. No dress! Why, this one will do, of course. Thank you, dear George; I shall not be a minute; wait for me—you will come too?"

Utterly regardless of Miss Heaton's shocked feelings, Elva hurried into her wedding-gown regardless of anything that might be said.

"What will people think to see you in that gown?"

"People! I have done caring for them. Papa is ill; he wants me. Will he care whether I am in white or black?"

She seized her long white veil and twisted it round her head.

"Elva! impossible! At least, remember— I will fetch my largest cloak and a bonnet."

But Elva never waited for Miss Heaton's return. Her strength had returned as she hurried into the passage and met George in the hall.

"Mr. Heaton's pony-carriage is at the door," said George, even at this moment struck with the beauty of this white-robed woman who was suddenly forced by this new anxiety to forget herself.

"Thank you. Quick, George! A cloak—here is Miss Heaton. Never mind a bonnet, I will put this hood on. Please drive quickly! Tell me, what is the matter?"

"I don't know. An attack—breathlessness."

"Oh, George! was it—that?"

She meant was her wedding the cause of the illness.

"Oh, no; he was all right two hours ago. I saw him walk off briskly toward Rushbrook. The groom said something about an accident near the Pools. He was brought home."

"Accident! Impossible! Who brought him home?"

George coughed, then spoke the truth, thinking: "It will shame the devil if it does nothing else." "Hoel Fenner and Jesse Vicary."

No other word was spoken till Elva reached home. The doors were open, the chill wind swept into the beautiful hall without let or hinderance; there were two dog-carts waiting a little way off. One was Dr. Pink's, the other was the one that had come from Greystone. It was only when George Guthrie came to insist that Elva had been

disturbed, Miss Heaton not choosing to tell her before, and indeed not guessing the importance of the case.

Elva hurried up the steps, threw off her cloak in the hall, and without further preparation passed through the first drawing-room, where she saw a few frightened servants whispering together.

They did not dare to stop her; and besides, her appearance all in white was startling. She looked like an angel suddenly sweeping through them—the Angel of Death.

She opened the door and saw confusedly several persons. She knew some one said: "Don't go on." She shook off another hand that was laid on her arm, and walked boldly forward, tall and beautiful and strong in purpose.

"Papa—where is he?"

There was no help for it. They made a little way for her, and she saw—saw her father lying on the sofa just as Amice had seen him, except that his hands were now crossed over his chest, his eyes were closed, his white hair hung over his black coat, in the button-hole of which was still pinned a bit of orange-blossom, pinned in by Elva that morning.

"Papa!" she cried; and, never dreaming how strange she looked in her white gown, she flung herself on her knees, wound her arms round him and kissed him. She drew back startled. She kissed a cheek that was as cold as marble.

She slowly unwound her arms, for death naturally horrifies youth. She knew this was death, though no one told her; but she did not move away; on the contrary, she put her hands on the cold, motionless ones that would never again fondle her. Her heart seemed to die within her, her whole brain was filled with the idea: "Have I killed him? Did he grieve so very much about it? Is this death? No, no, it can not be!"

She turned round suddenly and gazed at the people near her. There was Dr. Pink close beside her, and Jones, a little was off, was standing as if waiting for an order, and the housekeeper was crying audibly; and then behind them on one side stood Hoel, and in the window-seat Jesse sat crouched up with his head buried in his hands, apparently hearing and seeing nothing of this scene.

All at once Elva's eyes fixed themselves on Hoel, and she went quickly toward him. He had expected some sign of

recognition, some tone of voice to remind him of the past; but from her manner to him he might have been a mere stranger.

"They say you were with him, Mr. Fenner, when he was taken ill; tell me everything about it. It may help Doctor Pink. Why do they not do something more for him? Nobody is trying to restore him. Tell me what to do!"

Hoel longed to comfort her, longed to have the right to lead her away and speak words of love to her, but he could not; he was nothing to her, only a mere stranger, and she was interested in him only as being the man who was with her father.

It might have been far otherwise, and this "might have been" awed him strangely.

"We can none of us do more for him," he said, sadly, not daring to return her look, and his eyes resting on her arm saw a dull red stain on her white dress. It was where her father's head had rested.

"He has not been conscious since my arrival," added Dr. Pink. "He can not have suffered much. I have feared something of this sort if he did not take more care. Will you break it to your mother? Believe me, Mr. Fenner and Mr. Vicary did all that men could do—they brought him home."

"Go to your mother, Elva," said George Guthrie, coming up; he feared that if she stayed she would not be able to bear the strain longer. He put his arm round her and led her away; he did what Hoel would have given all he had to do.

At the head of the stairs they met Amice. No one had told her yet that the end had come, but she seemed to know at once, by the look on their faces, that all was over.

"My poor Elva," said Amice, clinging to her. She could say no more, and Elva had no tears to shed.

"We must tell mamma," said Elva; "she has nothing to reproach herself with—nothing."

"Neither have you, Elva. It was the—". She saw George and did not finish. She was going to say "The curse."

"George, will you stay here?" said Elva; "you will be a help to us. And if any one else has to stay, will you ask them and take it into your own hands. We must think

only of mamma; that is what he would like best. Oh, George, no one knows what he was to me. Is it true, or only a dreadful dream?"

She did not wait for the answer, and she and Amice softly entered Mrs. Kestell's room.

George Guthrie did indeed act the part of a brother. He was thunder-struck by the events of the day; but some one had to take the lead in the household, and George was that some one. He knew that Hoel Fenner and Vicary would be wanted at the inquest. Of course Dr. Pink, having attended him for some months, this would be a mere formal affair. Still all this must be kept as much as possible from the poor widow and children. Even in his consternation George Guthrie was a little amused at the presence of Hoel.

"Where is he to go? How am I to house an outlaw? and yet he can't stay here. I never was put in such a predicament before. Elva is half married, and Hoel Fenner has come back. What the dickens does it all mean? Curiosity is womanish; but I should like to know the explanation of that mysterious disappearance. Poor Mr. Kestell, he was too much cut up at Elva's second failure. However, we must all die; and he was ready for it, and his money is safe enough. All left to his wife for her life, I suppose. My cousin is sure to ask sadly about the will. Death means money to her."

George smiled to himself as he went to consult Dr. Pink and to see that all was kept quiet in the melancholy house. As to Hoel Fenner he and Jesse Vicary walked sadly away to Greystone, promising to come back in the morning.

That evening the two were alone in the little quiet sitting-room which Hoel had learned only to hate. He insisted on Jesse staying with him for he was afraid of leaving him alone, so utterly miserable was he. Hoel had to learn to put his own grief away in order to comfort the poor fellow, but he understood illness now after his long convalescence, and he could see that unless great care was taken of Jesse he might really succumb to the mental anxiety he had gone through.

It was the first taste of doing something for another, the first attempt to give the cup of cold water for the sake of something higher than his own pleasure; but it was not an easy task to comfort Jesse. He would not be comfort-

ed; the horror of that sight and of the revelation was too powerful to be put away even for an instant.

"Jesse, you must not look at it in this way. We have all been to blame—terribly to blame; even now I am bewildered. I do not know how to act. But remember, he gave you that letter; will you not read it? He evidently much wished you to do so."

Jesse drew out the letter and the large envelope from his pocket, then he opened the will, which was not closed. It was written in Mr. Kestell's own handwriting, and was witnessed by two names. One was the Greystone lawyer, and the other was Jones. It had been signed and witnessed on this very morning.

Jesse handed it to Hoel.

"Tell me why he wanted me to read it," he said.

Hoel cast his eyes over it.

"He leaves a third of his property to his wife and to his daughters after her, the other two thirds he leaves to you in restitution."

"And the letter? Read it to me if you please. I can not see the writing."

Hoel opened the sheet of paper and read the letter. To them both it was as if the dying man were uttering the words.

Jesse listened with bent head, his hands supporting it, his elbows resting on his knees. Every now and then he shuddered as if a cold blast were shaking him. The history of his birth was now told to him, the mystery of his life revealed to him, and yet he listened as if it were the story of some other life not connected with himself.

"I write this letter at midnight on the 13th of May, and I wish to declare that I am fully conscious of the importance of the facts related in it, and that in consequence I have drawn up a new will on this same evening, and as far as I am able I have in it made what restitution is possible.

"I wish to spare those I love and who love me all the pain that this declaration would give them if I made it publicly; but if circumstances force you, Jesse Pellew, to reveal the facts, I hope the blow will be made to fall as lightly as possible on my innocent wife and children, who are quite ignorant of the events I must relate.

"Before I married I was a hard-working young man with fair prospects—for I knew that through my exertions the old business was much improved—but when I proposed to Lord Ovenden for the hand of his daughter Celia, he thought that my means were not adequate for his daughter's position. I promised him she should never want for all solid comforts; I promised him also that I should grow rich, and that nothing could daunt me. I loved his daughter truly, passionately, and it was from pure love that I married her and not to improve my standing in the county. Besides, the Kestells were a good family, and at last I overcame the doubts of Lord Ovenden and obtained his consent to our marriage. Nothing remained but to set about fulfilling my promise of one day becoming a rich man.

"At that time among my friends I reckoned John Pellew. He was a young man whose very qualities had led him into trouble, for he was generous, willful, and sometimes obstinate. He had been sent to India and was doing well there when he had to come home invalided. His parents thought this a good opportunity to make up a match between him and a young lady of some fortune. Unfortunately, while staying with me, John Pellew, in his usual hasty manner, had fallen in love with a village girl of great beauty, and before he had really faced all the consequences he had promised to marry her. All this he of course kept to himself till there was no way out of the difficulty. He utterly refused the marriage arranged for him, offended his family, and at last went back to India to make his own fortune. It was only just before sailing that he confided to me the secret of his marriage with Lucy Vicary, begging me to do what I could to befriend her, but saying he dared not allow her to take his name because of his family, who, he was sure, would never receive her. He also gave me all the ready money he had, which was, poor fellow, never very much, and also told me that he had invested four hundred pounds in a piece of land which a certain Button wished to sell, being very hard up, and which John Pellew, who was always doing something generous at the expense of his own interest or that of his friends, agreed to buy.

"This land, said he, was to be his child's inheritance, for his wife was expecting her confinement in a few months. Further, he made me promise not to reveal his

secret till such a time as he should himself come home and openly acknowledge his wife.

"I tried to point out to him the foolishness of his conduct, but as the deed was done I promised to keep his secret, accepted his title-deeds for, as I thought, a worthless bit of land, and bade him good-bye.

"At this time my own affairs fully occupied my mind, still I did what I could for the poor girl whom he had left to bear the brunt of life's hardships. Her mother was angry at her marriage, but had understood very little about it, except that marrying a gentleman meant receiving very little money. The old clergyman who had married them was almost childish, and the neighbors taunted her with letting her daughter wed an adventurer who, most likely, had a wife somewhere else, as he was so mysterious.

"I did my best to smooth their difficulties, made them remove from the distant forest village to a cottage on the Beacon, but as the money John Pellew left was soon spent I sent them as much as I could, for the poor young thing drooped directly her husband was gone, and spent her time in fretting.

"I was then expecting my first child, and my sympathy was therefore called out toward John's unhappy wife, and before her twins were born I did not let her want for anything, but I then seriously began thinking of writing to John and telling him plainly that I could not afford to keep his wife, that the land must be sold, and that I would set about finding a purchaser, though I doubted whether he would get back his four hundred pounds.

"Before I had put this resolution into effect came the news of the sudden death of John Pellew from fever, and with his death the wretched secret seemed to be buried, except so far as I was concerned.

"I was hesitating what course to pursue when Lucy's twins were born and she died two days after, happily confiding them to my care, as she believed what her husband had told her about their inheritance, as he called his poor little property.

"It was at this time that the events happened which tempted me to the sin which has ever since hung its deadly weight round my neck. I can hardly write down exactly the chain of events, they were so mixed and so inter-

twined. I always meant to do right and always saw some loop-hole which would make everything straight, but I do not remember the exact moment when I felt that it was impossible for me to draw back or to begin again.

"The grandmother died soon after her daughter, but before her death I learned that John Pellew's bit of land was valuable—nay, more, that it would make the fortune of any man who owned it. For once in his life John had fallen in luck's way, poor fellow! but only when it was too late for him to enjoy it. I had spent a good deal of money on his wife out of my own pocket, and trying to forget the lately acquired knowledge that the property was valuable, I said that I would become the purchaser of Pellew's bit of land. All the four hundred pounds should be spent on his children; as for the rest, I had promised solemnly not to reveal their name till he gave me leave; I would keep that promise.

"As I said before, all this was gradually reasoned out, and I always reserved to myself the right of making everything straight, till at last I recognized that that right had passed from me, so that I could but go on hiding the truth.

"I always lived in dread of these things: The discovery of John Pellew's marriage, the discovery of the real ownership of his land, and therefore the loss of my own fortune.

"That land seemed to be a perfect treasure-trove; the mines on it yielded enormous profits, and yet I argued that they were legally mine, for I had spent money on the wife and children before I knew the worth of the land; then was it not perfectly in my right to sell the land and repay myself? That was all I had done. How easy it is to argue to one's self! Again, I said, even if John Pellew had kept his land, he would not have had money enough to work it. It was my money that unlocked the treasure-trove, and do we not see in every-day life that the original possessor or inventor has to go to the wall?

"Joe Button, the son of the man who had sold it to John Pellew, was another source of disquiet to me; he, poor fellow, had no earthly claim, and yet he never could get it out of his head that he ought to share some of the wealth I got from it.

"For fear of his setting others to inquire, I pensioned him.

"The rest you, John Jesse Pellew, know for yourself. I need not recapitulate. You accused me of a crime I never committed, but I was not less guilty toward you. To have contradicted you would have been to have caused you to make further inquiries. I preferred writing this confession, and leaving you to decide in what manner you will require restitution at my hands. My last will shall be placed in your hands with this letter. May you deal mercifully with those who are infinitely dear to me, and for whose sake I have borne a long martyrdom, even as you look for mercy before an all-knowing Judge.

"Remember, a man's conscience is more powerful than a man's will. He may be condemned by the one, and yet be unable to face the consequence of acting under the dictation of the other. To trifle with your will is to kill it. Use this letter as you think best.

"JOSIAH KESTELL,
"*Rushbrook House.*

"To J. J. PELLEW, Esq."

Hoel folded up the letter, and in deep silence he put it back into the envelope.

"It was my conduct brought him to this end!" said Jesse, raising his head. "How can I ever forgive myself? What will gold do for me, Mr. Fenner? Do you see what he says about the conscience and the will? I would not accept what I fancied was God's and man's injustice toward me, and so—so—he allowed me to lose all control of my will. How am I better than Mr. Kestell, who has written this confession, while I shall never be able to confess my share of to-day's sad business?"

"Jesse, don't, I entreat you, accuse yourself! To go back to the root of the matter, it was my silence that urged you on. I found out John Pellew's marriage, and putting things together, I unraveled the mystery; and yet, because of my abominable self-love, and also, I hope, my love for Miss Kestell, I dared not face the disgrace nor bring it upon them. Mr. Kestell was, I am sure, aware of my reasons; he must have despised me. Even he could judge my conduct; I ought to have told you the truth, but I dared not. And now see how little my cowardice has availed. The consequences of sin are terribly far-reaching."

"Yes, it goes back and back, and spreads around; it

wraps one round, and there is no escape—there is none for me!"

"That was not your doctrine before, Jesse," said Hoel, gently, wondering at himself as Saul must have wondered when he found himself among the prophets.

"Thank you," said Jesse, starting up with a new light in his eyes, and he grasped Hoel's hand. "Mr. Fenner, you are right; that was not my doctrine when I was guiltless; now that I have sinned I must arise and go to my Father. I have much to do. Thank you for your help. Anyhow, let me begin. Take this letter for me, I can not bear to see it; but this—this is another matter." He tore the will in two and threw it on the fire.

"Jesse, wait! What are you doing? Remember the proof of your birth, of your property!"

"We can prove it in other ways than through this hateful gold. One thing more, I think that Miss Amice Kestell knows this—do you?"

"Yes, I fear she guesses most of it."

"Then show her the letter and tell her I resign everything but my father's name. Look, I have two strong hands, and I can keep Symee in the colonies if not here."

Hoel put his hand on Jesse's shoulder.

"Don't be rash, my dear fellow. Remember that now you have your cousin Hoel Fenner to reckon with."

CHAPTER XXI.

A MEETING ON THE MOOR.

More than a year has gone by, and a year makes a great change even in a country lane to those who have observant eyes. Nature works miracles by following her own infinitesimal laws, and why should the kingdom of the spiritual world be less marvelous?

The strange events that took place at quiet Rushbrook are still occasionally talked about, because anything out of the ordinary is welcome to the country mind.

Mr. Kestell's sudden death of course put the wedding out of the range of possibilities, and as Walter Akister only once returned to Rushbrook, and then emigrated, the idea of his again acting the part of a bridegroom was out of the question. It was known as an open secret that Elva utterly rejected the idea of fulfilling her engagement.

Mr. Kestell's will excited immense interest, for the amount of his riches had been a staple subject of conversation. There was much talk about a last will, but as no last will was ever found, the one before the last stood valid, and the curious public were overjoyed to find that Kestell of Greystone died a rich man, though not quite so fabulously wealthy as he had been said to be.

He left large sums to charity, which George Guthrie said was a thousand pities; it was a bad example to other rich men not to give in their life-time, but then Mr. Kestell had always been generous, so George was called "a terrible radical" by his cousin for his queer remark. Next Mr. Kestell left his wife half his fortune with Rushbrook House, and the other half between his two daughters, out of which, however, ten thousand pounds were to be paid to Jesse Vicary, and another ten thousand to his sister.

The world was loud in its praises. Mr. Kestell was indeed generous to the orphan children. Jesse Vicary had got more than he deserved, for lately he had not given much satisfaction to his patron, and as to Symee, why, she would be ruined with so much money. It was even mooted, *sub rosa*, whether that will which had mysteriously disappeared was not to revoke this bequest, but the further inference that Jesse had got hold of it and destroyed it was too preposterous to be much entertained, except now and then by one of Mrs. Eagle Bennison's "I wonder if."

But further surprises were in store for Rushbrook. Mrs. Kestell became a strong woman, and took to the world like a duck to water. She insisted on buying a London house, and as soon as possible entertained on the plea that it was for a daughter's sake. Nay, more, she became an active domestic tyrant, and having so long husbanded her strength, found that she had plenty to spare for this purpose.

Elva and Amice had begun by humoring her every wish, so that she might miss her husband less, but they found that their days of freedom were over. Amice had been used to giving up her own way, but Elva found it a hard trial; still she determined to bear it without a murmur. Mrs. Kestell could always make her obey by one word of appeal to a dead father, and she used her power unmercifully.

Amice's doings were interesting to Rushbrook only in so far as they proved that she was a little "off her head." "As I have always said," remarked Miss Heaton, when she heard that Amice had scruples about property and had signed a deed of gift of most of her share of the money to be used for the good of the poor of London, the money being vested in the name of Jesse Vicary.

If Amice had married a groom and disgraced herself by first running away with him the outcry could not have been greater. Strangely enough, too, her odd ways and her uncanny second sight had disappeared since her father's death. She was more like other people, and ought, so people said, to have known better than to waste good money on the poor. As well throw your gold pieces at once into the sea than sink them in good works when no result can be visible. "It was quite different if one built something which could be called after your own name; that really was *distingué*," Mrs. Eagle Bennison said, "and was becoming fashionable." So, though Amice seemed like other people, except less selfish, she was pronounced "crazier than ever."

Jesse Vicary was not a gentleman, so what he did was of no importance; still Mrs. Eagle Bennison often heard about him from George Guthrie, who really liked "the lower orders," apart from societies to do them good. It was a strange taste, but he had it, just as Captain Dusantory had a fancy for consorting with Spiritualists. Well, Jesse and his sister actually lived still in Golden Sparrow Street, though they each had the interest of ten thousand pounds! George had just come to Court Garden after a long stay in town, and his cousin was listening to the news.

"You see how difficult, George, it is to reform low-class people. Birds of a feather flock together; even if you buy a pretty cage for them, they won't live in it. That's what comes of building model cottages. I always tell the squire it is of no use, they like to be dirty best."

In vain George Guthrie explained that Jesse lived in a very nice little house which was as clean as 'Liza could make it, and that this very young person had better not hear his cousin abusing her Mr. Vicary, adding:

"Jesse Vicary is a man in a thousand; he gives his life up to reforming Golden Sparrow Street, and he thinks he's

only doing his duty. Dear coz, judge not till you have paid a visit to the Golden Sparrow neighborhood."

"Quite a waste of time, I think."

"Oh, but he writes for the 'Current Reader,' too. Hoel Fenner is always there, so I assure you you will meet good company."

"Don't mention that wicked literary young man to me, George. I suppose he means to make up to Elva again; but I know dear Mrs. Kestell is looking higher now, so Elva will never be allowed to make a mistake again."

"Elva, my dear cousin, never will make another mistake; she is too wise; she has succumbed to the last infirmity of noble minds, in fact she has written a novel."

"Written a novel! Not under her own name? It is so terrible when a young woman dubs herself as literary—no sensible young man will marry her."

"Well, you must tell her this when they come here after the season, the beginning of August. You know she is clever, and she had better write novels than be a martyr to her father's memory any longer. I declare the dead are sometimes as tyrannous as the living."

"George, how shocking! But you haven't heard my news. There really is going to be a wedding at Rushbrook, and this time I am sure the lady will not be clever enough to say no. Guess." George guessed wrong, of course. How was a poor bachelor to be equal to probing the secrets of the heart?

"Well, it's Mr. Heaton himself. Miss Heaton went out for a fortnight's holiday, and during that time he became engaged to Betta Akister, but she says gravely that her father was so much put out and hindered by Walter's attempt at matrimony that she must manage all this without him. There's a meteor or an eclipse or something expected in the sky!"

"Poor Miss Heaton! Well done, Herbert! Why, she never tried to shield him in that quarter!"

George chuckled over this at intervals during the rest of the day, but he was more interested in Elva than in Herbert Heaton's love affairs.

When he had been in London he had learned to forgive Hoel, who was altogether a changed man, and Hoel had let out his hopeless secret—though without revealing the reason of that "mysterious exodus," as George called it.

Elva still treated him as a stranger. They met pretty frequently at other people's houses, but the result was *nil*. As a last resource, George wickedly suggested that Hoel should review Elva's novel; he little guessed that he had done it once before.

This novel, published under her own name, was a very different work of art from "An Undine of To-day." It was a simple story, but the pathos, if somewhat too somber for a general reader, was true. Hoel in his rooms read it, but positively dared not review it as highly as he should have done had he had no connection with the writer, for fear Elva should think he was not sincere. Poor Hoel, he was very sick at heart. His love had deepened, had outgrown all its proper limits, and yet he was no nearer to Elva. He knew he should never dare to mention it to her. Jesse was his only confidant and his only comforter, though as he thought it perfectly natural that Hoel should love for the rest of his life and never get further reward, the comfort was cold, if of a high order.

The cousins had resolved to keep Jesse's name a secret for a year, so as, if possible, to avert all suspicion from the memory of Mr. Kestell. Amice knew everything, and she, though she would not keep the money that was so tainted with sin, agreed to keep all knowledge of this from her mother and sister. She said that Jesse had the right to command, she must only obey, but she began a new and a happier life. To her imagination it seemed that the curse was taken away, for she entirely lost all her much-dreaded second sight from the day of her father's death. Clever doctors could of course have explained it to her in another way, but the mind is altogether out of the province of medicine.

Amice believed in penance, and hers took the form of going out to parties to please her mother, but this duty over, she would find time to dress herself in an unfashionable style, and go to Golden Sparrow Street to have a chat with Symee, who was indeed a happy woman. There was no more pinching, no more strange looks from Jesse, only just the work she liked, seeing after his bodily comfort, of which he was so careless, and helping him with his poor people.

When Miss Amice came Jesse received her as if she had been the queen in person, and Symee, of course, could not

welcome her enough. There was always so much to talk about in the disposing of the fund. Jesse would consult Miss Amice, but Symee noticed with pleasure that the latter deferred entirely to Jesse's opinion.

"We owe all our happiness to you and Mr. Kestell," Symee often said at first, but as these words really pained Miss Amice she left off saying them; but to her the memory of Mr. Kestell was sacred.

Happiness is very beautiful, so let no one believe in the modern moralists who love the dark side of life and who, from their words, would have us believe that our race is doomed to misery. Of these three Amice was the happiest, for Jesse would persist in looking upon himself as a man who, like David, had greatly sinned and must greatly repent. And Symee was learning slowly from them both that perfect joy comes only in work for others.

Toward the end of the season, and when Elva and Amice were looking forward to seeing once more their beloved forest lands, their aunt, Mrs. Fitzgerald, was escorting them to a big "At Home" at the house of a fashionable lady. Mrs. Fitzgerald was now very gracious to her nieces, because her own daughters had all married first and she could afford to be kind to "those poor Kestells."

"By the way, Elva," said her aunt, as they were driving to their destination, "Mr. Fenner is sure to be there; he is thought so much of in the literary world now. I hear he is going to marry Sir Arthur Parke's daughter. She is a very clever girl and very charming. It was a pity you changed your mind, for really he is quite a *parti* now. The cousin who inherited all the uncle's property has lately died, and Mr. Fenner will now be rich as well as distinguished. I think you were a very silly girl. Literature is quite the fashion now, and if you can't get rank—"

Elva was brave; she did not betray by word or look that her heart sunk down, and that all the sunshine went out of the day.

"I hope he will be happy," was her answer; but Amice understood. Unobserved, she slipped her hand into her sister's, and she suddenly hated Hoel. "I thought he was true to her," she said to herself.

That afternoon the sisters got separated in the crowd, and Elva met Hoel face to face.

She held out her hand as usual, and poor Hoel, who always felt utterly stupid when near to her, from excess of humility and dread of putting himself still further from her, murmured a commonplace remark.

"I thought you would be here. I wanted to tell you myself that—"

"Thank you," she interrupted him, very quietly, "I wanted to be the first to—"

"To say you did not believe that I want to retract past words?"

Elva flushed; she positively could not be master of the tell-tale color; she could hardly believe she heard aright. Certainly Hoel Fenner was honest now; but did he think she still held him bound by those old false promises? Still, it was cruel of him, and yet how was she to cure herself? This must cure her. One thing she was sure of, he could never guess her feelings.

"No," she answered; "I wished merely to congratulate you."

Elva had never looked so dignified and beautiful as she did now. Hoel would have kissed the hem of her garment, but modern society in the form of a "squash" entirely precluded this idea being carried out; besides, Elva's own far-off dignity in any case kept him stationary.

"At having changed my views?" he asked, wistfully, as he looked at her for one instant.

Elva could bear no more; she saw some one who claimed her attention, and she left Hoel without answering his remark.

He remained staring at nothing in his corner; he hated the room and the people, and almost life itself. He said his punishment was greater than he could bear. At this moment Amice touched him.

"I was looking for you, Mr. Fenner."

Her voice trembled with indignation. She looked round and saw they were quite alone in this crowd.

"Let me congratulate you," said Amice, scornfully. Irony being a new weapon in her hands, she used it rather wildly.

"On what?"

"On your engagement to Miss Parke, who is clever, I hear, and very, very—"

"Good heavens! is that what your sister meant?" Hoel turned hot all over.

"We have just heard it."

"What nonsense! Amice, you know better, you know I am sick to death; I live on crumbs of bare notice; I know your sister will never, never forgive me, never love me, and yet I go on hoping against hope. What am I to do? How can I come to her with no excuse! You, at least, know the truth—"

Amice was conquered at once. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Forgive me; it was only to-day I felt sure that—"

"That what?"

"Elva loves you still."

"But will not trust me? That is terrible."

"I don't know. When will Mr. Pellew take his own name? Till then—I—"

Poor Amice! the shame of the past swept over her again.

"My cousin will do so now if you wish it."

"He often tells me what you are to him," said Amice, her blue eyes fixed on Hoel. "Without you he would have taken life in the wrong way."

"Then the obligation is mutual. But, Amice, let me speak to you as I would to a sister. Don't believe such rumors again; they only pain me. If your sister will never forgive, then I shall never marry."

"I must tell her the truth, then," said Amice.

"But remember what she will suffer. No; I can bear it for her sake. You have heard perhaps that I am a rich man now. When it is too late, perhaps—still—"

"Yes, I see."

They parted, but Hoel was in a fever of misery. There was nothing he would take in exchange for Elva. Riches had come too late.

He walked on heedlessly, speaking to people who spoke to him, but looking for Elva. He found her at last just as she was going out of the room.

"One minute, Miss Kestell. You mistook me just now. I was talking of your book, but I suppose you still hate critics." He tried to speak lightly.

"You said once that those who aspired to write must be willing to suffer," she said, with a new hope that Miss Parke was a myth.

"I was one-sided; but I know better now. Those who aspire to be critics must understand suffering."

Mrs. Fitzgerald was coming down upon them in full sail; she was bound for another fashionable port.

"Good-bye," said Elva, "we go to Rushbrook to-morrow," and Hoel fell back into his slough of despondency.

A week afterward he was raised up from it and looked up into a blue sky. He received a letter from Elva.

"RUSHBROOK.

"DEAR MR. FENNER,—Since I saw you Amice has told me the truth. Why did you both hide it from me for so long? It was for his sake and my mother's sake, I see; but, oh! why did I not know it before? I would have faced the world for him and with him; the sin of those we love must be ours too. Did you think I feared poverty or shame with him? No one knew him as I did, and yet I was not allowed to help him.

"But even now, though sometimes I feel crushed by remembrance, I am glad to know the truth. If he can know anything now, he knows that I should never have forsaken him.

"You feared to share our shame; but you came back at last.

"Who am I to blame you? I am but his daughter even now. But I can not forget—now I know it—what you have done since. It is through you and Mr. Pellew that we have been shielded, it is through you that his memory is not defamed.

"For her sake and for his I accept the sacrifice. Some day, if we meet again, you will let me thank you.

"ELVA KESTELL."

Hoel never knew how often he read that letter. He fancied he had known Elva before; but these few words revealed to him something nobler than he had imagined, almost nobler than he had formerly been able to conceive. A woman whose love was as the immovable rock, whose forgiveness was as healing to the bruised heart as cool ointment on the scorched flesh. How was Hoel to be worthy of this love? Even now, however, her words held out but a faint hope for himself.

He put on his hat and went toward Golden Sparrow Street. At the entrance he met George Guthrie.

"Halloo, Fenner! are you blind? I've been waving my stick at you as if you were a cabby, and all to no purpose. I've run up from Rushbrook to congratulate Jesse on his new name. Queer, these sudden discoveries, eh? It makes me remember—well, it almost explains a good many puzzles."

"No, no," said Hoel, earnestly, "don't puzzle out anything; help us to make it appear natural. It's Jesse's greatest wish. Have you come from Rushbrook?"

"Yes, and it's looking its best. The Kestells are there, and look all the better for mixing in general society. Amice is getting quite commonplace. By the way, why don't you come down for a little holiday? But perhaps you are going abroad?"

"Miss Kestell might not like it."

"Elva has taken to writing novels; of course, that is supposed to alter some people; but when I knew her she was a girl who had a trick of sticking to her original opinion about people. To be quite plain, I really think she is expecting to see you."

Hoel paused on the threshold of Jesse's house.

"Do you think I have the least chance? The truth is, I've been a coward all along, and now—"

"Turn over a new leaf and try. I've come with an invitation from Elva to—let me see, your cousin—isn't he now?—to spend a week at Rushbrook House with Symee. If he has not renounced all pleasure, his native air will do Jesse good. He's a fine fellow, and my cousin has just recollected the fact. She says, 'He always did look like a gentleman; I said so years ago.'"

Hoel smiled, as he said sadly:

"Elva didn't ask me."

"Pshaw! Do you think she ever would? But take the word of a bachelor, she expects you all the same."

And then they walked upstairs and Hoel sat down and, instead of hearing what was said, he lost himself in a beautiful dream of autumn glory on the moors.

That evening Elva received a tiny note, but she took it out on the moor to read it all alone.

The moonlight was painting the moorland; every shade of palest blue, of gray, and of silver was over the land-

scape; but the mist did not yet hide the waving lines of hills, and the wind swept softly over the lovely land.

"I must come, I must, if only, Elva, my dearest, my life, to ask for your forgiveness, if only just to feel the touch of your hand and to know that you, the best, the most noble of women, have not altogether forgotten that I love you, and that, if that love is not yet perfect, it shall become so in time, and that when it is perfect you will not reject it.

"HOEL FENNER.

"I will be on the moor where I first picked the gentians to-morrow at six o'clock. If I see you there I shall know that love like yours can forgive cowardice like mine."

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The evening is drawing in over the forest. The sun has sunk behind the high land. In the west every shade of orange, apricot yellow, lemon, is here, swept across the sky in bands that melt into one another. From the east a dark-gray, misty horizon comes stretching into the western glory, getting darker as it rises, till it too faints into blue and silver above the heads of two who are slowly making their way home almost in silence, because the fullness of love is silent. Above their heads one or two stars alone stand out to herald their fellows. The harvest moon has not yet risen, only a bank of misty, pale purple is where she must appear. It is not dark nor light. The daylight colors of foliage have all disappeared, and the distant trees are drawn out in neutral tint, but the yellow stubble-fields are plain, and the silver sand on the winding moorland paths appears white in the half light. The distant outlines of undulating country are still visible, but nothing hard remains save the dark trees against the sky. Nature is hushed, except for a few sounds, the familiarity of which prevent the loneliness from being oppressive. A distant watch-dog's bark, and nearer, a robin's wild, sweet notes rise clear and strong from the trees of the gill, the stream trickles steadily, a faint evening wind slightly rustles the beeches and lifts the leaves of its neighbor till nothing is left but a tree of silver. By the next rising stands a pyramidal stack of hop-poles that look for all the world like a wigwam, and when the two have passed it they turn and gaze on the scenes and notice that the hop-poles rise dark and clearly defined

against the orange sky. The gray curtain deepens in the south, and the apricot sky becomes intensified, while the yellow light seems to dart up and quiver into the lemon color above, then sink down again into the slowly fading apricot band.

Now the pair have reached the brow of the Beacon, and they can see a few scattered houses; in one of them a bright light seems to give a friendly welcome to the passers-by. Suddenly a little girl of some eight years comes toward them. She is laden with two heavy parcels which she has slung across her shoulders. It is the family bread and the green corn for the chickens, and she is making her way to some cottages more than a mile away.

Elva stoops down and says a few kind words, and Hoel, out of the fullness of an overflowing heart, also stoops and puts a new half crown in the child's hand. Then she smilingly trudges off into the deepening twilight, patient and uncomplaining for her long walk. That little gift has made the bread and the green corn quite light.

"My darling," Hoel says, "I feel as if I must give something to everybody at Rushbrook, because of my happiness," and Elva answers:

"There are so many burdens we can help to lighten together—oh, Hoel, together!"

THE END.